ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

5 Cents

lessed Are the Meek

he Chinese Apple

omebody on the Phone
he Italian
n Ounce of Curiosity
he Great Bank Fraud
ellow Death
ouble Trouble

Winner of $2000 First Prize

Winner of a $500 Third Prize

APRIL

GEORGES SIMENON

JOSEPH SHEARING

WILLIAM IRISH
A. E. W. MASON
CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND
EDGAR WALLACE
RAOUL WHITFIELD
HUGH O'CONNOR & WALTER DURANTY

N ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

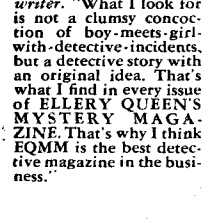
LICENSED TO LIVE.COM
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOHN DICKSON CARR, *famous mystery writer.* "What I look for is not a clumsy concoction of boy-meets-girl-with-detective-incidents, but a detective story with an original idea. That's what I find in every issue of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE. That's why I think EQMM is the best detective magazine in the business."

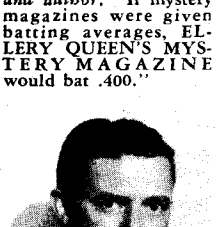
HILDEGARDE, *star of radio and supper clubs.* "I like ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE because it is so exciting and I like exciting things. I often carry it around with me to read on trips or at other times when I have a free moment or two. Please renew my subscription."

LAURITZ MELCHIOR, *heroic tenor of the Metropolitan Opera Company.* "ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE is a really fine collection of stimulating tales. After a strenuous evening at the Metropolitan, or a day of shooting on the movie lot, I find real relaxation in reading a story or two in your magazine. I am all for it."

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY, *critic and author* "ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE has both the good wry bread of the run-of-the-guillotine crime tales and ALSO what a gift he has for rummaging out the honeys—those rare oddities that are vintage and not varicose. In short E.Q. has I.Q."



ILKA CHASE, *actress and author.* "If mystery magazines were given batting averages, ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE would bat .400."



JAMES HILTON, *renowned author of "So Well Remembered" and "Lost Horizon."* "I have seen and enjoyed many copies of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE. It seems to me just about the best form of 'escapism.'"

Whoever heard *such* talk from *such* people about a mystery magazine?

Never has any mystery magazine been so applauded by such distinguished applauders. "Never" is a big word — but Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine is a big departure from all the usual kinds of magazine. It gives you not only the best short stories by leading detective-story writers, but also little-known crime classics by the literary great in other fields.

Thus you get mysteries by Somerset Maugham, Christopher Morley, Mark Twain, H. G. Wells and Theodore Dreiser, as well as by the acknowledged masters of the mystery field—Dashiell Hammett, Agatha Christie, John Dickson Carr, Cornell Woolrich, Dorothy L. Sayers and many others.

35c At your newsstand EVERY MONTH

In addition to the distinguished applauders pictured here, EQMM has received orchids from such notables as Arch Oboler, Helen Jepson, Efrem Kurtz, Rex Stout, Edward L. Bernays, James M. Cain, Elsa Maxwell, Joseph Henry Jackson, and many others!

By Subscription $4 a year

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK, *Publisher* ELLERY QUEEN, *Editor*

570 LEXINGTON AVENUE, NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ANNUAL REPORT ON EQMM'S PRIZE CONTESTS — *Ellery Queen* — 4

THE MULTIPLE MURDER DETECTIVE STORY
BLESSED ARE THE MEEK — *Georges Simenon* — 10

THE HARDBOILED DETECTIVE STORY
YELLOW DEATH — *Raoul Whitfield* — 37

THE PROFESSIONAL DETECTIVE AT WORK
THE ITALIAN — *A. E. W. Mason* — 51
THE GREAT BANK FRAUD — *Edgar Wallace* — 106

THE "BITER BIT" DETECTIVE STORY
DOUBLE TROUBLE — *Hugh O'Connor & Walter Duranty* — 65

SPEAKING OF CRIME
THE SHORT SHUDDER — *Anthony Boucher* — 78

THE GASLIGHT THRILLER
THE CHINESE APPLE — *Joseph Shearing* — 81

THE RUSTIC DETECTIVE STORY
AN OUNCE OF CURIOSITY — *Clarence Budington Kelland* — 94

THE "UNKNOWN" DETECTIVE STORY
MITHRIDATES THE KING — *Morley Roberts* — 116

THE HUMAN INTEREST DETECTIVE STORY
KICK — *Hugh MacNair Kahler* — 124

THE ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE STORY
MYSTERIOUS DEATH IN PERCY STREET — *Baroness Orczy* — 127

TOUR DE FORCE
SOMEBODY ON THE PHONE — *William Irish* — 141

PUBLISHER: *Lawrence E. Spivak* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Vol. 13, No. 65, APRIL 1949.

Copyright, 1949, by The American Mercury, Inc. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved by the publishers in the U. S., Great Britain, Australia, Mexico, and all other countries participating in the International Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

℞

Take one copy of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE *regularly each month.*

Doctor Cure

Do you suffer from insomnia, nervous indigestion, worry, restlessness? Here is a prescription that can't fail. It will cure your insomnia, relieve your worry, relax you mentally and physically and bring you more fun and pleasure than you have had in a long time. It is a prescription taken regularly by people like John Dickson Carr, Hildegarde, Lauritz Melchior, James Hilton, Christopher Morley and Ilka Chase. James Hilton, for example, says, "I have seen and enjoyed many copies of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE. It seems to me just about the best form of escapism."

TRY THIS PRESCRIPTION AT OUR EXPENSE. IF IT FAILS TO CURE . . . JUST WRITE US AFTER YOU'VE READ THE FIRST ISSUE AND YOUR SUBSCRIPTION PRICE WILL BE REFUNDED

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Please send me ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE. I enclose
$4.00 for 1 yr. ☐ $7.00 for 2 yrs. ☐ $10.00 for 3 yrs. ☐

Name.....

Address.....

City.....*Zone*.....*State*.....

Q65

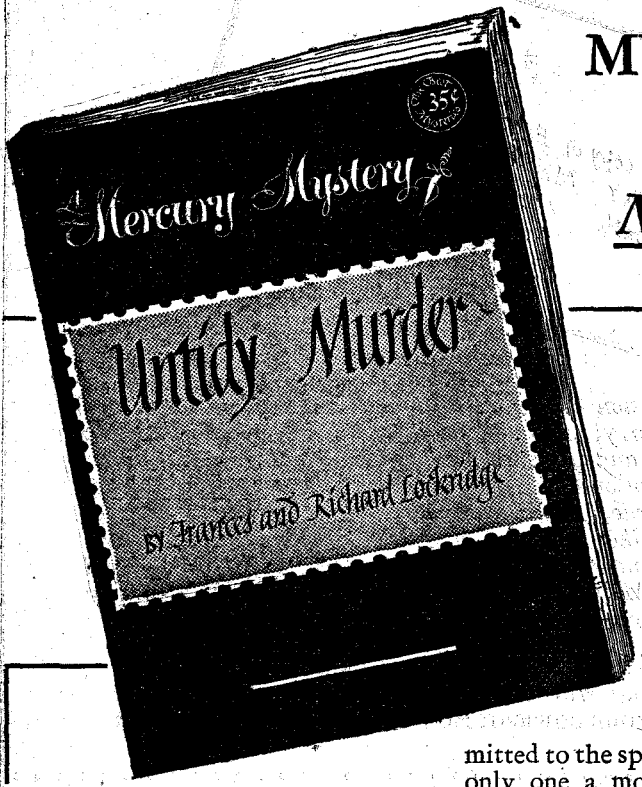
ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE is published monthly by The American Mercury, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U. S. and its possessions, and in the countries of the Pan-American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter August 28, 1941, at the post office at Concord, N. H., under the act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U. S. A. Published also in Australian and French editions by affiliated companies. Published in a Talking-Record Edition by the American Printing House for the Blind, Louisville, Ky.

Cover Photograph by Bill Stone

ROBERT P. MILLS, *Managing Editor* — JOSEPH W. FERMAN, *General Manager*
CHARLOTTE R. SPIVAK, *Associate Editor* — GEORGE SALTER, *Art Director*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Each MERCURY MYSTERY is a MYSTERY-FAN'S *MUST*...



Just out— at all newsstands

● It's *got* to be good to be a Mercury Mystery. Mystery readers know that — so they watch the newsstands for the new Mercury Mystery each month.

The very fact that it was chosen for the Mercury Mystery list guarantees that it's tops — that there's no gamble about its being good. For out of the hundreds of detective stories submitted to the special board of editors, only one a month is selected as a Mercury Mystery. It may be the work of a leading author of detective stories — or of an author who's on the way to the top. Either way, any mystery that's a Mercury Mystery is a mystery fan's *must*. Sometimes they are reprinted in full but more often they are cut to speed up the story, always, of course, with permission of the author or his publisher.

A new *Mercury Mystery* is on the stands each month

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

QUADRENNIAL REPORT ON EQMM's PRIZE CONTESTS

by ELLERY QUEEN

I. *Statistics*

Mise en scène . . . Three and one-half walls in your Editors' sanctum sanctorum bristle with bookshelves, each shelf teeming with 'tec tomes and volumes of villainy unmask'd. Jutting out from the walls, toward the center of the room, are double-width tiers, each tier choked with chronicles of crime. In the middle of the room are the Editors' desks, perpetually piled with a phantasmagoria of manuscripts, proofs, letters, magazines, and other murderous memoranda. And all around, on the floor, on the chairs, on the tables, is a sea of books — the duodecimos of detection and the manuals of manhunting.

The half-wall which is bare of books is a corner — a reading corner — and one of the two wall-ends which bounds the corner is hung with pictures. There is an unknown and unpublished original by Frederic Dorr Steele, illustrating THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES, and showing Holmes and Watson finding the body of Selden under the "cold, clear moon" of the Devonshire moor. There is a portrait of Wilkie Collins, framed with an excerpt from THE MOONSTONE, the excerpt written in Collins's bold, flowing hand, signed with his characteristic C-flourish, and ending: ". . . the yellow wilderness of the beach, with one solitary black figure standing on it — the figure of Sergeant Cuff." And there is a crisp line-drawing of E. A. Poe — the one which frontispieced QUEEN'S QUORUM.

The other wall-end is strikingly more business-like. It too displays three frames, but they do not contain pictures. One frame encompasses an up-to-date map of the world, and the others surround two graphs. Together, the three record the statistical history of *EQMM's* Annual Contests, from their inception to the time of this writing.

Consider the first graph, which we shall call *The Quantity Chart.* A thread of scarlet shows the rise and fall in the number of manuscripts submitted to *EQMM's* four prize contests to date. In 1945 the blood-red line reached a point in the graph indicating 838 submissions. In 1946 the line dropped to 623. In 1947 it rose sharply — to a Himalayan 862. And last year the crimson line dipped to 793 manuscripts — below the peak of the preceding year, but still well above the average established in the first three years. Conclusion? Well, let us examine the other statistics first.

The second graph might be called

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Quality Chart. Here the scarlet thread outlines no hills and valleys — the trend is steadily upward, to an ever higher mountain-top. In 1945, the first year in which *EQMM* held its annual contest, we awarded 16 prizes. In 1946, despite a twenty-five percent drop in the number of entries, we found 18 stories worthy of purchase and publication. In 1947 we awarded no less than 25 prizes. And last year the average quality was so high that, although we had guaranteed only 10 prizes, we finally awarded 31 — a truly remarkable number of prizewinning stories in a single year's competition.

Now, consider the map, which we shall call *The Locality Chart.* Each year, as manuscripts arrive, we keep a cartographic record of the points of origin — by sticking red-headed pins in a map of both hemispheres. Last year the *EQMM* contest continued to maintain its World-Wide scope. Submissions came in from 42 of the 48 states of the Union, from the District of Columbia, and from all six continents.

North America was represented by stories from the United States, Alaska, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, Jamaica, Bermuda, and Panama Canal Zone. South American postmarks included British Guiana, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. Asia sent entries from China, Japan, India, Hawaii, and the Philippines. Africa broke all its previous marks, eleven manuscripts coming from Union of South Africa alone. Australia again answered the 'tec tocsin. And Europe mailed in stories from England, Ireland, France, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, and Portugal.

Conclusions? *The Quantity Chart* tells us that interest in *EQMM's* Annual Detective Story Contest has not diminished. *The Quality Chart* proves that with each passing year better and better detective short stories are being written. And *The Locality Chart* reminds us once again that the far-flung nations of our imperiled planet are more united and more at peace with each other than ever before — *detective-storywise.* When will our muddled statesmen realize that it can be *everywise?* When will our proudly stubborn leaders heed the lesson being taught year after year by the humble detective-story writers of the world? When will our protocoleopterous diplomats remember that blessed are the meek for it is they who shall inherit the earth. . . .

II. *Logistics*

In army parlance, logistics is that branch of the military art which deals with the transport, quartering, and supply of troops. In mystery parlance, logistics is that branch of the literary art which might be said to deal with the care and feeding of the detective story.

The future of the detective story depends on new blood — make no mistake about that. The Old Masters — Poe, Doyle, Shiel, Post, Leblanc, Futrelle, Orczy, Freeman, Chesterton, Bramah, Anderson — the old-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

timers are gone: they have cashed in their criminological chips. The New Masters are getting on: soon — all too soon — Bailey, Christie, Crofts, Sayers, MacDonald, Berkeley, Wilde, Stribling, Simenon, Gardner, Stout, Marsh, Blake, Innes, Ambler, Charteris, Allingham, Bentley, Carr, Hammett, Woolrich, Vickers will be the grand old men (and women) of the grand old game. Who will take their places? Who will keep the detective story going, growing, glowing? Only the beginners, the detective debutants. Only they have the incentive, the ambition, the vitality — and, we fervently hope, the daring. Only the 'tec tyros of today can be the mystery masters of tomorrow.

Thus, the most important thing a detective-story contest can do is *to encourage beginners*, and the most important thing a detective-story magazine can do is *to publish the work of beginners* — especially those eager, talented young writers who have yet to break into print.

Thus, encouraging, helping, and publishing new writers is the highest form of literary logistics, and this care and feeding of criminological cubs is the highest duty and greatest responsibility of any detective-story contest.

Last year's contest riveted home this fundamental truth. For the outstanding developments of last year's contest were the startling increase in the number of stories submitted by beginners, and even more significant, the remarkable improvement in the quality of these "first stories." In *EQMM's* 1945 contest only 1 of the 16 prizewinners was a story by a new and previously unpublished writer. The inclusion of that story in THE QUEEN'S AWARDS, 1946 must have served as a beckoning green light to other beginners. In the following year new writers won 3 of the 18 awards. And last year 5 of the 25 prizes went to 'tec tenderfeet.

Note the steady increase: about 6 percent three years ago, about 17 percent two years ago, and a full 20 percent last year. Here was a trend, a tremendous trend — and we did not see it. Here was positive evidence that the young men were coming on — "call hallelujah, call amen . . . The strong men keep coming on" — and we muffed it completely. Nowhere in our earlier reports did we call attention to the relentless rise of the beginners. And what happened? Acutely aware of our blindness, the beginners all over the world determined to wake us up — violently. In last year's contest the bloodhound beginners stormed the citadel of crime, cracked our detective defenses, and seized a sensational share of the spoils.

For consider: of the 31 prizes awarded last year, 11 — more than 35 percent! — went to writers who never before had had any literary work published. These eleven "first stories" will appear in *EQMM*, starting with the next issue, and by the time the eleventh story is published, we hope to have discovered other new writers and purchased other "first stories" — so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that *EQMM* can keep a special Department of New Writers running indefinitely.

Now, here are the 20 prizewinning tales written by established authors:

FIRST PRIZE

Blessed Are the Meek by Georges Simenon

SECOND PRIZE

Dust to Dust by Wilbur Daniel Steele

THIRD PRIZES

A Study in White by Nicholas Blake
The Cat's-Paw by Stanley Ellin
The Chinese Apple by Joseph Shearing
Double Exposure by Ben Hecht
Lacrimae Rerum by Edmund Crispin

FOURTH PRIZES

Forget-Me-Knot by Barry Perowne
Beyond the Sea of Death by Miriam Allen deFord
The Big Shots by John Di Silvestro
Crisis, 1999 by Fredric Brown
The Monster by Vincent Cornier
Two Over Par by Kelley Roos

SPECIAL AWARDS

Thou Lord Seest Me by Q. Patrick
The Singing Diamonds by Helen McCloy
Off the Face of the Earth by Clayton Rawson
The Arrow of God by Leslie Charteris
The Patchwork Murder by Roy Vickers
The Viotti Stradivarius by Lillian de la Torre
The Vampire by Thomas Narcejac

And here are the 11 stories by new writers which so lavishly and so heartening justified our 1945 prediction that "the future of the detective-crime short story is bright indeed . . . [the 1945 prizewinning stories] open the door to a renaissance, to a more golden era."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FIRST STORIES

The Fine Italian Hand	by Thomas Flanagan
Ask Maria	by Floyd Mahannah
The Queen Is Dead	by Mildred Arthur
Riding the Ghost	by Harl Cook
A Matter of the Tax Payers' Money	by Vinnie Williams
Let Me Help You With Your Murders	by T. M. McDade
Subject to Review	by Mary Adams Sarett
The Gewgaw Murder	by I. J. Jay
Small Murder	by John Granger
The Procurator of Justice	by Stephen Barr
The Dwarfs' Club	by Francisco A. Branco

Hail, ye blithe and blooming beginners! Blessings on your bloody blunders! Remember, he has half the deed done, who has made a beginning; Horace wrote that, and Plato said: The beginning is the most important part of the work. But Publilius Syrus warned: Take care not to begin anything of which you may repent.

If you have the ambition, the talent, and the perseverance to write detective stories — then make a beginning. We hereby proclaim *EQMM's* Fifth Annual Contest officially on, and we cordially invite all beginners to submit manuscripts. Every submission will be given the most careful editorial consideration, either for a regular prize or a special beginners' award. The Fifth Annual Contest will close October 20, 1949, and winners will be announced and prizes awarded by Christmas 1949.

Win or lose, O doubtful ones, O reluctant ones, you will never regret making a beginning. And you will find *EQMM* and Your Humble Servants, in the words of Virgil, most favorable to bold beginnings.

III. *Characteristics*

What other trends were revealed in last year's contest? What other qualities of style and characteristics of technique came sharply into focus? Interestingly, the revelations were many, varied, and impressive, and they concerned not only the larger aspect of literary approach but also the creative difficulties of plot and counterplot.

For example: It is abundantly clear that the psychological and psychiatric detective story is far from the end of its cycle. The so-called "suspense" tale is still a strong favorite, both with "ivory tower" and "sidewalk" practitioners.

The hardboiled story, judged by last year's submissions, is virtually extinct. And this is surprising: true, it has been obvious for some years that the hardboiled 'tec is on the wane; nevertheless, *EQMM* has reprinted examples of the savage, sexy, sophisticated school with such regularity as to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

encourage a revival of rough-riding realism. Yet not a dozen stories of guts-gore-and-gals were among the 793 manuscripts submitted in 1948.

Detective-story writers are returning to fundamentals — both in form and ferreting. They are beginning to pay more attention to the need for fresh, full-bodied ideas; to the ingenious dovetailing of physical action and mental reaction; and to an imaginative blend of the intellectual and the sensational, without sacrifice of surprise in the former and shock in the latter. In a phrase, more attention is being paid to sheer storytelling.

An analysis of the plots used in the 793 manuscripts indicates an appreciable shift from the purely emotional story to the purely deductive story. Ratiocination is coming back into its own, tempered with a new sense of balance and a new conception of values. An unexpectedly large number of "chess problem" stories were among last year's entries, and one classic type of detective story — the tale of multiple murder — showed a remarkable numerical increase. We could not help wondering if this connoted a delayed psychological hangover from the late War-to-End-War, in which mass murder seemed to reach its fullest expression of "civilized" development, only to shrink to insignificance in the shadow of atomic annihilation . . .

With a few exceptions every major type of the detective-crime short story is represented among the 31 prizewinners. You will find

The Multiple Murder
The Deductive Detective
The Psychiatric Detective
The Perfect Crime
The Psychological Detective Story
The Chess Puzzle
The Husband-and-Wife Detectives
The Futuristic Detective Story
The Realistic Detective Story
The Trick Ending
The Unusual Method
The Gaslight Thriller
The Impossible Crime
The Tour de Force
The Romantic Crime Story
The Locked Room
The Case History
The Hardboiled Detective
The Historical Detective Story
The Humorous Detective Story
The Specialist Detective

Indeed, last year's prizewinners constitute an amazingly comprehensive survey of the modern detective-crime short story, as it is being written today, and explains what W. Somerset Maugham meant when, in 1944, he wrote: "I have a notion that when the historians of literature come to discourse upon the fiction produced by the English-speaking peoples during the first half of this century, they will pass somewhat lightly over the productions of the serious novelists and turn their attention to the immense and varied achievement of the detective writers."

And each year adds flesh and blood, depth and stature, to that "immense and varied achievement."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WINNER OF FIRST PRIZE:

GEORGES SIMENON

Emile Gaboriau, author of the world's first detective novel and creator of Monsieur Lecoq . . . Gaston Leroux, author of one of the world's classic "locked room" novels and creator of Rouletabille . . . Maurice Leblanc, author of the world's finest picaresque detective novels and creator of Arsène Lupin. Thus, the royal line of French detective-story writers . . . and now, the current king, the wearer of France's criminological crown, Georges Simenon, creator of Inspector Maigret — and Monsieur Simenon is no pretender, he is of the royal "blood," and easy lies the head that wears his crown . . .

Ever since Georges Simenon came to America, he has been leading a semi-nomadic life. He bought a car, packed all his belongings in it, and drives wherever a road may happen to go. When he finds a spot to his liking, he settles down — for a while. Already he has lived in Montreal, New York City, Bradentown Beach (Florida), and Phoenix (Arizona). As you see, M. Simenon gets around. He is now residing at a dude ranch at Tumacacori (Arizona). And wherever he tarries, he writes — steadily, hungrily.

M. Simenon has grown to love these United States, and he hopes to become a citizen. His only complaint is that he cannot find a publisher who can publish all his books. Otherwise, the United States is offering him a most cordial welcome: Hollywood has already purchased two Maigret novels, one of which will feature Charles Laughton (magnificent casting!) as the great Gallic gumshoer.

M. Simenon's prizewinning story, judged the best submitted in EQMM's Fourth Annual Contest, is a tale of multiple murder, told from a psychological viewpoint. The mental and emotional probing is not so deep as to be psychiatric, nor is it so shallow as to be meaningless; but it does create and sustain a mood which catches the reader's imagination on the first page and holds it to the last — and even beyond, for this story will remain fixed in your memory. Like M. Simenon's best work, "Blessed Are the Meek" mirrors French middle-class people with a sincerity and realism which explain why the author's stories are so often described as "more than just detective stories." And it presents in the humble little tailor, Kachoudas, the most appealing type of modern detective — the little man of the world, the little man of profound good will but with all the fears and foibles of all the little men — like you and you and me . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

by GEORGES SIMENON

(translated by Frances Frenaye)

Blessed are the meek . . .

Kachoudas, the humble little tailor of the Rue des Prémontrés, was afraid; of this there could be no doubt. A thousand people, ten thousand, to be exact — the entire population of the town except for the very young children — were afraid too, but most of them did not dare to admit it even in the privacy of their own bedrooms.

Several minutes had gone by since Kachoudas had lit the electric light which he pulled by a wire into a position directly over his work. It was not yet five o'clock but the darkness of the November evening had closed in around him. It had rained steadily for a whole fortnight. A hundred yards away, at the cinema festooned with purple lights where a bell sputtered to announce the beginning of every show, a newsreel showed people in other parts of the country navigating the streets in rowboats, and farmhouses cut off by torrents of water which carried along uprooted trees.

These facts were important; they had a bearing on the whole situation. If it hadn't been late autumn with the darkness coming on at four o'clock in the afternoon; if it hadn't rained from morning to night and from night to morning again, to the point where many people didn't have a stitch of dry clothes to put on their back; if there hadn't been gusts of wind whirling down the narrow streets and turning umbrellas inside out as if they were gloves, then perhaps Kachoudas wouldn't have been afraid and, what's more, nothing would have happened.

Kachoudas was sitting with crossed legs on the big table that he had polished with his hind-quarters all day long for the thirty years he had plied his trade as a tailor. He worked on a mezzanine floor with a low ceiling just above his shop. Just across the street an enormous sign in the form of a red top hat hung over the sidewalk in front of a haberdashery. When Kachoudas looked out he could see under the sign into the shop of Monsieur Labbé.

This establishment was badly lighted. The electric-light bulbs were covered with dust and the window had not been washed for a long time. These details are less important, but they played their part. The haberdashery was old and so was the street on which it was situated, which had been the shopping center of the town before the five-and-ten-cent stores and others with glittering show-cases had moved in on a thoroughfare five

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hundred yards away. Now the shops remaining on this dimly illuminated section of the street were so rundown that it looked as if no one ever went into them at all.

Here, then, was another reason for being afraid. And finally, this was the usual hour. At this time every day Kachoudas had the vaguely uncomfortable feeling that meant he must have the glass of white wine which a habit of long standing had made seem absolutely essential.

Monsieur Labbé across the street had exactly the same feeling; for him too this was the usual hour. As a result he would say a few words to Alfred, his red-headed clerk, and put on a heavy overcoat with a velvet collar.

At the same time the little tailor would get down from his table, knot his tie, put on his jacket, and go down the spiral stairway, calling out behind him:

"I'll be back in fifteen minutes."

This wasn't strictly true. He invariably stayed away for half an hour, but for years now he had announced his return in fifteen minutes.

Just as he was slipping on his raincoat, one which a customer had left and forgotten to call for, he heard the automatic bell ring as the door opened across the street. Monsieur Labbé, his coat collar turned up and his hands in his pockets, was walking close to the walls on the sheltered part of the sidewalk in the direction of the Place Gambetta.

The tailor's bell rang too a moment later, and Kachoudas stepped into the driving rain hardly ten yards behind his neighbor.

The two of them were quite alone on the street, where the gas lamps were spaced far apart, leaving stretches of darkness between them.

With a few quick steps Kachoudas could have overtaken the haberdasher. They were acquainted, exchanged greetings when they shut up their shops at the same time, and spoke to each other in the Café de la Paix where they were both due to arrive in a few minutes. But they occupied quite different ranks in society: Monsieur Labbé was Monsieur Labbé and Kachoudas was only Kachoudas.

Kachoudas, then, was bringing up the rear, and this fact served to reassure him. If someone were to attack him he had only to cry out and the haberdasher would hear him. But what if the haberdasher were to run away? Kachoudas thought this over. The idea sent shivers down his spine, and the fear of being ambushed at a dark corner or alley caused him to walk in the middle of the street. There was not far to go. At the end of the Rue des Prémontrés lay the central square, well lighted and with a certain number of people about in spite of the rain. There a policeman was usually on duty.

The two men, one behind the other, turned to the left. The third building just ahead of them was the Café de la Paix, with its bright lights and comforting warmth. The regular customers were at their tables and Firmin, the waiter, was watching

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them play cards. Monsieur Labbé took off his overcoat and shook it, and Firmin hung it on the rack. When Kachoudas came in no one helped him off with his raincoat. Naturally, for he was only Kachoudas. The card players and those who were looking on at their game shook the haberdasher's hand, and he sat down just behind the doctor. They gave a curt nod, or perhaps no sign of recognition at all, to Kachoudas who could find no better place to sit than right up against the stove. As a result steam began to rise from his trousers.

The steaming wet trousers led the little tailor to make his discovery. He looked down at them and said to himself that because the cloth was not of very good quality they would probably shrink again. Then, with a professional eye, he examined Monsieur Labbé's trousers to see if their material was better. Of course he did not make Monsieur Labbé's suits. None of the highly respectable people who frequented the café at this hour came to him for their clothes. At most they gave him linings or patchwork to do.

There was sawdust on the floor and wet feet had left irregular marks in it and clumps of mud here and there. Monsieur Labbé was wearing expensive shoes and dark gray, almost black, trousers. On the cuff of his left trouser leg there was a tiny spot of white. If Kachoudas had not been a tailor he would probably never have noticed it. He thought right away that it must be a thread, because tailors are given to pulling threads out. If he had not been such a humble little tailor he would probably not have leaned over to pick it off.

The haberdasher noticed his gesture with some surprise. Kachoudas seized the white spot, which had slid down into the cuff, and it turned out to be not a thread but a scrap of paper.

"Excuse me," he murmured.

The Kachoudases were always excusing themselves. Centuries ago, when they were driven like cattle from Armenia to Smyrna and Syria and other such places, they had acquired this cautious mannerism.

It must be stressed that while Kachoudas was straightening himself up there was not a single thought in his head. Or, to be exact, he thought only: "It isn't a thread, after all . . ."

He could see the legs and feet of the card players, the cast-iron feet of the marble-topped tables, and Firmin's white apron. Instead of throwing the scrap of paper on the floor he held it out to the haberdasher, repeating:

"Excuse me . . ."

He felt that he must apologize because the haberdasher might wonder why in the world he had poked about in his trouser cuff.

But just as Monsieur Labbé took the paper, which was hardly bigger than a piece of confetti, Kachoudas suddenly stiffened and a most unpleasant shiver ran across the back of his neck. The worst of it was that the haberdasher and he were looking straight at each other. For a moment

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they went on staring. No one was paying them any attention; the players were at their cards and the others were watching the game.

Monsieur Labbé was a man who had been fat and then lost a good part of his weight. He was still fairly voluminous, but there was a flabby look about him. His drooping features were generally expressionless, and on this critical occasion they did not flicker. He took the paper, rolled it between his fingers until it was no bigger than a pinhead, and said:

"Thanks, Kachoudas."

This caused the little tailor any amount of reflection; for days and nights after he asked himself: Was the haberdasher's voice natural? Ironical? Threatening? Sarcastic?

The tailor trembled and almost dropped the glass that he had picked up in order to keep his self-control. He must not look at Monsieur Labbé. It was too dangerous. It was a question of life and death — if, indeed, Kachoudas could hope to hang on to his life at all. He sat glued to his chair, apparently quite still, but with a feeling as if he were jumping up and down. There were moments when he had to hold himself back from running away as fast as he could go. What would happen if he were to get up and shout:

"This is the man!"

He was hot and cold at the same time. The heat of the stove was burning his skin and yet his teeth were on the point of chattering. All of a sudden he remembered how on the Rue des Prémontrés fear had caused him to follow the haberdasher as closely as he could. This was not the first time he had clung to his shadow, and he had done so only a quarter of an hour before. *They had been quite alone in the dark street and now he knew that this was the man!* The little tailor wanted to look at him on the sly, but he did not dare. One look might seal his fate.

Above all he must not run his hand over his neck, as he had a violent longing to do, akin to the temptation to scratch a bad itch.

"Another white wine, Firmin."

A further blunder. Usually he let half an hour go by before ordering a second glass. What should he do? What could he do?

The walls of the Café de la Paix were studded with mirrors, which reflected rising coils of cigarette and pipe smoke. Monsieur Labbé was the only one who smoked cigars and Kachoudas occasionally caught a whiff of them. At the other end of the room, on the right, near the washroom, there was a telephone booth. Under the pretext of going to the toilet, couldn't he slip into it?

"Hello . . . Police? Your man is here . . ."

What if Monsieur Labbé were to push into the booth behind him? No one would hear, for it was always done quite noiselessly. Not a single one of the six victims had cried out. They were all old women, to be sure. The killer had never attacked anyone but an old woman. That was why the men were so bold and did not hesitate to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

go out on the streets. But there was no reason why the killer should not break the rule.

"The man you're after is here . . . Come and get him . . ."

Twenty thousand francs would be coming to him. This was the reward that everyone was trying to win — so many people, indeed, that the police were at their wits' end with the number of wild clues they were asked to follow. If he had twenty thousand francs . . . But, first of all, who would believe him? He would say:

"It's the haberdasher!"

And they would reply: "Prove it."

"I saw two letters . . ."

"What letters?"

"An *n* and a *t*."

He really wasn't sure about the *t*!

"Explain exactly what you mean, Kachoudas . . ."

They would talk sternly to him; people always talk sternly to a Kachoudas.

". . . in the cuff of his trouser . . . Then he rolled it into a tiny ball . . ."

Incidentally, where was that tiny ball now, the ball the size of a pinhead? Just try and find it! Monsieur Labbé might have let it drop on the floor where he could grind it with his heel into the sawdust. Or he might have swallowed it.

What did it prove anyhow? That the haberdasher had cut two letters out of a newspaper? Not even that much. He might have picked up the scrap of paper almost anywhere without even noticing it. And what if he *had* had a whim to cut the letters out of a newspaper? It was enough to unsettle a much stronger man than the little tailor, to upset any one of the respectable business men sitting about him — shopkeepers, an insurance agent, a wine merchant, all well enough off to spend a good part of the afternoon playing cards and to drink several *apéritifs* every day.

They didn't know. No one knew except Kachoudas. And the man was aware that Kachoudas knew . . . The little tailor was perspiring as if he had drunk hot grog and taken a powerful dose of aspirin. Had the haberdasher noticed his nervousness? Did he look as if he had caught on to the meaning of the scrap of paper?

How could he think over these critical matters without betraying his thoughts, when the other man was smoking his cigar less than six feet away and he, Kachoudas, was supposed to be watching the card players?

"A white wine, Firmin . . ."

He spoke up quite unintentionally, almost in spite of himself, because his throat was so dry. Three glasses of white wine were too many, more than he had ever drunk at a time except when his children were born. He had eight children now and was waiting for a ninth. No sooner was one born than another seemed to follow. It wasn't his fault, although every time people looked at him accusingly.

How could anyone kill a man with eight children and a ninth on the way, and probably a tenth after that?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Just then someone, the insurance agent, who was dealing out the cards, said:

"Queer, he hasn't killed an old woman for three days now . . . He must be scared . . ."

There was Kachoudas, knowing what he knew, obliged to listen to this remark without so much as a look at the haberdasher. Then he had a stroke of his usual bad luck. As by dint of a tremendous effort he looked straight ahead of him, he saw Monsieur Labbé's face in a mirror on the wall. Monsieur Labbé was staring right at him. He was perfectly at ease, but none the less he was staring and it seemed to the little tailor as if there were a slight smile on his lips. He began to wonder if the haberdasher wasn't going to wink at him, the way he might wink at an accomplice, as if to say:

"A good joke, eh?"

Kachoudas heard his own voice say: "Waiter . . ."

A very poor idea. Three glasses of wine were enough, more than enough, especially as too much made him sick.

"Your order, Monsieur?"

"Oh, nothing . . . thank you . . ."

After all, there was one perfectly reasonable explanation. It was a bit hazy in the little tailor's mind, but it did hold water. There might be two men instead of one: one of them the killer of old women of whom nothing was known beyond the fact that he had done away with six of them in the last three weeks; the other merely someone who wanted to amuse himself and mystify the town — an eccentric, perhaps, who sent the famous communications addressed to the *Courrier de la Loire* made up of single letters cut out of newspapers. Why not? Such things have been known to happen. There are people who get strange ideas in their heads where crime is concerned. But if there were two men instead of one, how could the second one, who cut out and pasted up the letters, prophesy what the first one would do next?

For at least three of the murders had been announced ahead of time, all of them exactly the same way. The communications came to the *Courrier de la Loire* in the mail and usually the words in them had been cut right out of the *Courrier* itself and carefully stuck one beside the other. For instance:

It was no use to call out a special squad. Another old woman tomorrow.

Some of the communications were longer. It must have taken quite some time to find the right words in the newspaper and fit them together like a puzzle.

Inspector Micou thinks he's smart just because he came down from Paris. But he's only a choir-boy. He's foolish to drink all that brandy; it only makes his nose red.

By the way, didn't Inspector Micou, whom the *Sûreté Nationale* had sent to organize the hunt for the killer, stop in every now and then for a drink at the Café de la Paix? The little tailor had seen him there. It was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quite true that he liked brandy, and people would question him quite casually.

"Well, then, Inspector?"

"We'll get him, never fear. Maniacs of his kind are sure to slip up on something. They're too pleased with themselves and they have to boast of what they've done."

Yes, the haberdasher had been right there when the inspector had spoken these words.

Some fools say it's cowardice that makes me kill only old women. What if I simply can't stand old women? I have a right to dislike them, haven't I? But if they go on with this slander I'll kill a man, just to please them. A big, strong man, too. It's all the same to me. That will teach them a lesson!

Kachoudas was small and thin, no bigger than a fifteen-year-old boy.

"You see, Inspector . . ."

The tailor jumped. Inspector Micou had just walked into the café along with Pijolet, the dentist. The inspector was stout and hearty. He turned a chair around and sat astride it opposite the card players.

"Don't bother to move," he said to them.

"How's the hunt going?"

"Getting along, thank you, getting along."

"Any clues?"

Kachoudas could still see Monsieur Labbé starting at him in the mirror, and he had a new and frightening thought. What if Monsieur Labbé were innocent — innocent of the murders and of writing to the newspaper about them? What if he had got the scrap of paper into his trouser cuff by mere chance, as one sometimes gets a flea?

He must put himself in the other's place. Kachoudas had leaned over and picked something up. Monsieur Labbé couldn't know where the scrap of paper had come from. Perhaps the little tailor himself had let it fall and tried to make it disappear on the floor, then nervously picked it up and held it out to his neighbor. Yes, why shouldn't the haberdasher suspect him just as much as he suspected the haberdasher?

"A white wine . . ."

Never mind! He had drunk too much, but all the same he wanted more. There seemed to him to be more smoke than usual in the café; faces were blurred and the card players' table faded away into the distance.

Yes, think of that. If Monsieur Labbé suspected him in exactly the same way . . . Would he too set his mind on the twenty thousand francs reward? People said that he was rich, that it was because he didn't need money that he let his business slide. Otherwise he would clean his windows or even enlarge them, add more lighting, and get in some new stock. He couldn't hope that people would come to buy the hats in the styles of twenty years past that lay on his dust-covered shelves.

Yes, if he were a miser the twenty thousand francs might be a temptation. He had only to accuse Kachoudas, and most people would believe him. For Kachoudas was just

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the sort of fellow everyone inclines to distrust. Because he hadn't been born in the town, or even in the country, and he had a queerly shaped head which he held a little to one side. Because he lived among an ever-increasing brood of children and his wife hardly spoke a word of French.

But what of that? Why should the little tailor attack old women in the street without bothering to steal even their jewels or their handbags? So Kachoudas reasoned to himself, but the next minute he saw that the same argument held good for the haberdasher.

"Why should Monsieur Labbé, after living sixty years as a model citizen, suddenly feel an urge to strangle old women in dark streets?"

The problem was a complicated one. Neither the familiar atmosphere of the Café de la Paix nor the presence of Inspector Micou was reassuring any longer. Let someone merely suggest to Micou that Kachoudas was guilty and Micou would take him at his word. But if it were a question of Monsieur Labbé . . .

He must think it over seriously. It was a question of life and death. Hadn't the killer announced in the newspaper that he might attack a man next? There was the badly lighted Rue des Prémontrés to walk through, and his shop was just across from that of the haberdasher, who could spy on everything he did. Then there were the twenty thousand francs. Twenty thousand! More than he could earn in six months . . .

"Tell me, Kachoudas . . ."

He felt as if he were coming down to earth from very far away, back among people whose presence he had for several minutes completely forgotten. Because he did not recognize the voice his first impulse was to turn toward the haberdasher, who looked at him as he chewed his cigar. But it was not the haberdasher who had spoken to him, it was the inspector.

"Is it true that you work fast and don't overcharge?"

In a split second he realized what an unexpected piece of good luck this was, and he almost looked over at Monsieur Labbé to see if he had noticed the relief in his face. Kachoudas would never have dared go to the police. And he would have hesitated to write them a letter, because letters go into the files and one can never tell when they may cause trouble. And now the inspector himself, the representative of the law, had practically offered to come to him.

"When it's for mourning I can deliver a suit within twenty-four hours," he said modestly, lowering his eyes.

"Then pretend that I'm going into mourning for the six old women and make me a suit just as fast. I brought hardly anything with me from Paris and the rain has been hard on my clothes. You have some good wool cloth, I hope."

"The best there is."

Good Lord! The little tailor's thoughts were running away with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him! Perhaps it was the effect of four glasses of white wine. So much the worse! He ordered a fifth glass, in a more self-assured tone of voice than usual. Something wonderful was going to happen. Instead of going back alone, stricken with fear of *Monsieur Labbé* at every dark corner, he would get the inspector to go with him, under the pretext of taking his measurements. And once they were in the shop, behind closed doors . . . What a magnificent chance! The reward would be his! Twenty thousand francs! And without the slightest risk!

"If you can come with me for five minutes . . . My place is near by."

His voice trembled. This was luck of the sort a Kachoudas can't count on, not after centuries of having been kicked around by his fellowmen and an unkind fate.

"I could take your measurements and have it ready for tomorrow evening at the same time . . ."

How happy he was to get off to such a good start. All his worries were over, and everything was turning out all right, as if this were a fairy story. Men playing cards . . . good old Firmin (everyone looks good at a moment like this) watching the game . . . the haberdasher, whose gaze he sought to avoid . . . the inspector coming . . . they would go out together . . . he would close the door of his shop and no one would hear . . .

"Listen, Inspector, I know who is the killer . . ."

Then his hopes were dashed to the ground. One little sentence spoiled everything.

"I'm not in that much of a hurry, you know . . ."

The inspector wanted to join in the card game and he knew that someone would give him a place as soon as the hand was over.

"I'll come by tomorrow morning. You're always there, I suppose, aren't you? In weather like this, anyhow . . ."

It was all up. His fine plans had collapsed. Yet the whole thing had seemed so easy. By tomorrow he would probably be dead, and his wife and children would never have the twenty thousand francs which he was entitled to leave them. For he was more and more convinced that he had a right to the reward. He was sure of it, and he rebelled against the sudden obstacle in his path.

"If you were to come this evening, I could take advantage . . ."

No use. The haberdasher must be laughing up his sleeve. The hand was over and the insurance agent gave his place up to Inspector Micou. Detectives had no business playing cards! They should catch on to the slightest hint. Kachoudas couldn't very well beg him on bended knee to come for his measurements.

How was he to go away? Usually he stayed no more than half an hour at the café. This was his only distraction, his one folly. Then he always went home. The children were all back from school by then and they made the most infernal noise. The house,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

smelled of cooking. Dolphine (she had a ridiculously French name in spite of hardly knowing the language) called them in a shrill voice. And he pulled down the light over his work and sewed for long hours, perched on the mezzanine table . . .

He himself smelled, he knew that. He smelled of garlic, which they used abundantly in their cooking, and of the grease in the wool materials that he worked with all day. There were people in the Café de la Paix who drew back their chairs whenever he sat down near the table of the regular customers. Was that enough of a reason why the inspector shouldn't come with him? Every one of the others in the café lived in the direction of the Rue du Palais; they all turned to the left when they went out, while he turned to the right. It was a matter of life and death.

"One more, Firmin . . ."

Another glass of white wine. He had a terrible fear that the haberdasher might follow him out the door. But after he had ordered his wine it occurred to him that if Monsieur Labbé went out ahead of him he might lie in waiting at a dark corner of the Rue des Prémontrés. There was danger if the haberdasher left first, and even more danger if he left second. And yet Kachoudas couldn't stay there all night.

"Firmin . . ."

He hesitated. He knew that he was wrong, that he was going to be drunk, but there was nothing else to do.

"One more of the same . . ."

Everyone was sure to look at him with suspicion.

"How is Mathilde?"

Someone had just asked this question, but who was it? Kachoudas's head was heavy by now; he must have been at his seventh glass of wine. In fact, there was curiosity as to whether he was celebrating the arrival of a new baby. The question he had just heard might have been from Germain, the grocer. It didn't matter much, anyhow. The men were all about the same age, between sixty and sixty-five. Most of them had been in the same class at school; they had started out playing marbles together. Later on they had gone to each other's weddings and all their lives long they spoke to each other in intimate terms. Probably every one of them, when he was fifteen or sixteen years old, had courted a girl who had later married one of his friends.

There was another group of cronies, ranging from forty to fifty years of age, who were ready to step into the shoes of their elders as soon as they left this earthly scene. They played cards at another table, in the left-hand corner of the café. They were a good deal noisier, but they arrived later on, about six o'clock, because they didn't have quite as much leisure.

"How is Mathilde?"

This was a phrase that the little tailor heard almost every day. Some-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one would say it quite casually, just as if he were saying: "Is it still raining?" For Mathilde, the haberdasher's wife, had long since become a legend. Once upon a time she must have been a young girl like the rest. Perhaps some of the card players had stolen a kiss from her in their younger days. Then she had got married and probably she went in her best clothes to ten o'clock mass every Sunday. For fifteen years she had lived on a mezzanine floor, just opposite to Kachoudas, but her curtains were almost always drawn together. He could only guess at the presence of her motionless white face behind the lace hangings.

"Mathilde's all right . . ."

In other words, she was no worse, but her condition was just the same. She was a paralytic; every morning she was put into a chair and every evening put back to bed. So that the best that could be said for her was that she wasn't yet dead. After Mathilde the players spoke of a number of other things. They barely mentioned the killer, because the customers of the Café de la Paix affected a lack of interest in such things.

Kachoudas had not dared to go away for fear the haberdasher would leave just behind him. And so he went on drinking. Two or three times he noticed that Monsieur Labbé looked at the pale face of the clock hanging between two mirrors, but it never occurred to him to wonder why. This, however, is how he happened to notice that it was exactly seventeen minutes after six when the haberdasher got up and rapped with a coin on the marble table top to summon Firmin.

"How much do I owe you?"

When a man came in he usually shook hands all around, but when he went out he said goodby to everyone together. Some said: "See you tomorrow," and others: "See you later on," which meant that they were coming back for another game after dinner.

"He'll lie in wait at a dark corner of the Rue des Prémontrés and jump out at me as I go by . . ."

If only he could pay for his own drinks in time to follow close on the haberdasher's heels and not let him out of his sight! Kachoudas was the shorter and thinner of the two and probably he could run faster. The best thing to do was to keep a short distance behind and be ready to run at the least sign of suspicious behavior.

The two men went out, one a few seconds after the other. Strangely enough the card players turned to look after the little tailor rather than the haberdasher. There was something uneasy in his manner and a doubt crossed their minds. Someone half murmured:

"Could he be the one?"

Outside the wind was raging. At every corner it struck a man in the face and he either had to bend over double or else be thrown backwards by its impact. It was raining hard. The little tailor's face was streaming and he shivered beneath his light

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

raincoat. Never mind; he was right at the haberdasher's heels. He must keep up the pace, for in this nearness lay his only hope of safety. Three hundred yards, two hundred yards, one hundred yards more and he would be home, where he could lock the door and barricade himself in until the inspector came the next morning to see him.

He was still counting the seconds, when he noticed that the haberdasher had gone by his shop, where the red-headed clerk could still be vaguely seen behind the counter. Kachoudas went by his own place almost unconsciously; a force stronger than himself impelled him to follow on. Just as a little earlier the two of them were alone on the street, they continued to be alone in the more and more deserted section of the town which they were now entering. Each one of them could hear the other's footsteps, besides the echoes of his own. The haberdasher must know that he was being followed.

Kachoudas was half out of his senses with fear. Couldn't he stop, turn around, and go back home? Of course. Perhaps. But this never even occurred to him. Strange as it may seem, he was too congealed by fright. He went on, keeping about twenty yards behind his companion, and from time to time he spoke through the wind and rain to himself:

"If he's really the killer . . ."

Was he still uncertain? Was it in order to satisfy his conscience that he had undertaken this chase? Every now and then the two men passed before a lighted shop window. Then, one after the other, they plunged back into the darkness and could place each other only by the sound of their footsteps.

"If he stops, I'll stop too . . ."

The haberdasher did stop, and the tailor stopped after him. Then the haberdasher went on and the tailor followed him with a sigh of relief.

There were patrols all over the town, at least according to the newspaper. In order to preserve calm the police had thought up a so-called infallible patrol system. And indeed, as they strode on, one behind the other, they met three men in uniform trudging along in step, and Kachoudas heard them say:

"Good evening, Monsieur Labbé."

When they came to him they flashed a light in his face and said nothing.

There were no old women in the streets. It was enough to make one wonder where the killer ever found his victims. They must all cling to their homes, and go out only in broad daylight, preferably under escort. The two men passed the church of Saint Jean, where a dim light shone at the door. But for the last three weeks the old women must have given up coming to benediction.

The streets were growing narrower and narrower. There were empty lots and fences between the houses.

"He's luring me outside of town to kill me . . ."

Kachoudas was not a brave man,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and now he was thoroughly afraid and ready to call for help at the least untoward movement on the part of the haberdasher. If he still followed him, it was not of his own free will.

They had come to a quiet street with new houses along it. He could hear the footsteps, and then all of a sudden there was silence. Kachoudas came to a stop in imitation of the man he was following, sight unseen. Where had the haberdasher gone? The sidewalks were dark. There were only three street lamps, at some distance one from the other. There were a few lighted windows and from one house came strains of piano music. Always the same series of chords — from an exercise, Kachoudas thought, for he was not musical, which a learner was repeating over and over again with the same mistake at the end every time.

Had the rain stopped? In any case he was no longer aware of it. He dared neither go on nor turn back. He was alarmed by the slightest sound and worried lest the piano prevent him from hearing the footsteps that he was listening for.

The chords sounded five, ten times over, then the top of a piano was banged down. Evidently a lesson was at an end. There were loud cries and noise in the house. Probably a little girl, now that she was dismissed, was running to join her brothers and sisters. And someone was putting on a coat and saying to the mother at the door:

"She's made some progress . . . But the left hand . . . She simply must practice with that left hand . . ."

The door opened and the music teacher, who stood for a moment in a rectangle of light, was an elderly maiden lady.

"I promise you, Madame Bardon . . . I've only a hundred yards to go . . ."

Kachoudas could not breathe. It never occurred to him to call out:

"Stay where you are! Whatever you do, don't move!"

And yet he knew. He understood already how things would go. The old lady, who must have been a bit nervous, came down three steps from the door and trotted along close to the wall. It was her own street, after all, and she lived very near by. She had been born on this street and as a child she had played on its sidewalks and doorsteps; she knew every stick and stone of it.

Kachoudas heard her light, quick steps . . . then no steps at all! That was about all he could hear: *the absence of footsteps.* There was complete silence, and then a vague noise like the rustling of clothes. Could he possibly have made himself move? And what good would it have done? If he had called for help, would anyone have had the courage to come out of the house? He leaned up against a wall and his shirt stuck to his back, soaked with perspiration.

"Ah!" Kachoudas was the one to sigh. Perhaps the old lady had sighed too, for the last time. And the killer as well.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He heard steps again, a man's steps, retracing the way. The steps were coming toward Kachoudas. And Kachoudas, who had felt so sure that he could run faster than the haberdasher, could not even raise one foot from the ground! The haberdasher would see him. But didn't he know already that he was there? Hadn't he heard him just behind all the way from the Café de la Paix?

None of that mattered any more. Now the little tailor was entirely at the killer's mercy. This was Kachoudas' very clear impression and he did not argue with himself about it. The haberdasher seemed to take on superhuman proportions and Kachoudas was ready to fall down on his knees, if necessary, and swear to keep quiet for the rest of his life. Hang the twenty thousand francs!

He did not move as Monsieur Labbé drew nearer. Soon they would touch. At the last minute would Kachoudas have the strength to run? And if he did run, wouldn't he be accused of the murder? All the haberdasher had to do was to call for the police. They would run after him and catch him.

"Why were you running away?"

"Because . . ."

"Speak up. Didn't you kill the old lady?"

The two of them were alone on the street, and there was nothing to indicate that one of them was guilty rather than the other. Monsieur Labbé was quicker-witted, and he was a man of a certain position, a native of the town, on intimate terms with the leading citizens and with a cousin in parliament.

"Good night, Kachoudas."

Strange as it may seem, that was all that happened.

Monsieur Labbé must have barely made out his silhouette drawn back into the shadows. To tell the truth, Kachoudas had climbed up onto a doorstep and he had a finger on the doorbell, ready to push it at a moment's notice. And then the killer greeted him quietly as he went by, with a voice that was muffled but not particularly threatening.

"*Good night, Kachoudas.*"

He tried to answer, for the sake of politeness. It seemed to him absolutely necessary to have good manners with a man of this type and to return his greeting. He opened his mouth, but in vain; no sound came out of it. The footsteps were already moving away when he managed to get out:

"Good night, sir."

He heard his own voice, but he had spoken too late, when the haberdasher was already far away. Out of sheer delicacy Kachoudas had not called Monsieur Labbé by name, in order not to compromise him in any way. Exactly!

He was still on the doorstep. He had not the slightest desire to go see the old lady who half an hour before had been giving a piano lesson and who by now must have definitely gone on to another world. Monsieur Labbé was far away by this time. All of a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sudden panic overtook him. He mustn't stay in this place. He felt a strong urge to get away as fast as his legs would take him, and at the same time he was afraid of running into the haberdasher. He might be arrested from one minute to the next. Just a short while before a patrol had flashed a light in his face; they had seen and recognized him. How could he explain his presence in this section of the town, where he had no business and where someone had just been murdered? So much the worse! The best thing was to make a clean breast of the whole thing to the police. He started to walk along at a good pace, moving his lips.

"I'm only a poor tailor, Inspector, but I swear on the heads of my children . . ."

The least noise made him jump. The haberdasher might now be lying in ambush for him, just as he had done for the old lady. He took a roundabout way, and wandered through a maze of narrow streets where he had never set foot before.

"He couldn't imagine that I would come by here . . ."

He wasn't a complete fool, after all.

"I'm willing to tell you everything, but you must assign one or two of your men to guard me until he's behind the bars . . ."

If need be, he'd wait at the police station. Not a very comfortable place, but he'd seen worse in the course of his travels. He wouldn't hear his children's whining, that was one good thing. It was not very far from his own house, just two streets beyond the Rue des Prémontrés. Already he could see the red light with the word *Police* across it. There must be an officer right at the door, as usual. He was in no danger. In fact, he was safe at last.

"You'd be making a serious mistake, Monsieur Kachoudas . . ."

He stopped short. A real voice had spoken, the voice of a man of flesh and blood, the voice of the haberdasher.The haberdasher stood there against the wall, with his calm face barely visible through the darkness. Is a man responsible for his actions at such a moment? Kachoudas stammered: "I beg your pardon?"

Just as if he had bumped into someone on the street, or trod on a lady's foot. Then, when nothing more was said and he was let strictly alone, he turned quietly around. He must not look as if he were running away; on the contrary, he must walk like a perfectly normal man. No one was going to follow him right away. He had time to escape. At last he did hear steps behind him, but they were neither quicker nor slower than his own. In other words, the haberdasher wouldn't catch up with him.

Here was his own street, and his shop with a few samples of dark materials and some fashion drawings in the window. And the other shop, across the street. He opened the door, shut it again and turned the key in the lock.

"Is that you?" his wife called down from upstairs.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As if it could have been anyone else at such a late hour and in this weather!

"Be sure to wipe off your shoes."

At this point he wondered whether he was really awake. After all he had lived through, and with the massive shadow of the haberdasher still looming up at the opposite doorway, all she could say was:

"*Be sure to wipe off your shoes.*"

He felt very much like fainting. And what would she have said then?

Kachoudas was kneeling on the floor with his back to the window and just in front of him, only a few inches from his nose, the rotund legs and stomach of a man in an upright position. This man was Inspector Micou, who had not been distracted by the crime of the evening before from coming to have the tailor take his measurements.

The little tailor passed his tape measure around the waist and the hips, wet his pencil on the end of his tongue, and wrote down the figures in a greasy notebook lying on the floor; then he went on to measure the length of the trouser leg and the crotch. All this time Monsieur Labbé stood behind the lace curtains of the window at exactly the same height on the other side of the street. There were no more than eight yards between them. Kachoudas had an empty feeling in the pit of his stomach. The haberdasher would not shoot, he was sure of that. He would not shoot because, first of all, he was not the sort of murderer to go in for firearms. Murderers have their pet ways of doing things, just like anyone else, and they are not easily divorced from their habits. Besides, if he did shoot, he would simply be giving himself up to the police.

In the next place, the haberdasher had confidence in Kachoudas. This was the real point. And yet couldn't the little tailor, from his kneeling position, murmur to the rotund statue whose measurements he was taking:

"Don't move. Pretend nothing has happened. The haberdasher across the street is the killer. He's spying on us right now from behind his window."

But he said nothing at all, and stuck to the part of an innocent and unpretentious tailor. There was an unpleasant odor on the mezzanine, but this did not bother Kachoudas in the slightest degree, for he was quite used to the greasy smell of wool which he carried around with him wherever he went. Probably Monsieur Labbé's shop across the way had the staler and even more unpleasant odor of felt and glue. Every trade has its own stink. If such is the case, what smell is characteristic of a detective? This thought ran through Kachoudas' mind, and goes to show that he had recovered to some extent his aplomb.

"If you can come back late this afternoon for a fitting, I hope I can let you have your suit tomorrow morning . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He went downstairs behind the inspector, then passed in front of him as they walked through the shop, and opened the door, causing the bell to ring automatically. Neither of them had spoken of the killer, or of the elderly maiden lady, Mademoiselle Irène Mollard, whose murder was all over the front page of the newspaper.

And yet the tailor had spent a very restless night, so restless that his wife had wakened him to say:

"Try to lie quietly, will you? You do nothing but kick me!"

After that he could not go to sleep again. He lay awake, thinking hour after hour until his head began to ache. By six o'clock in the morning he had enough of lying in bed and thinking, and he got up. After he had made himself a cup of coffee he went to his workroom and lit a fire. Of course he had to put a light on, for it was not yet day. There was a light across the street too, since for years the haberdasher had got up at half-past five every morning. Unfortunately one couldn't see him through the curtains, but it was easy to guess what he was doing.

Monsieur Labbé's wife would have no callers. Very rarely did a friend penetrate beyond the front door and then for only a short time. She would not receive care even from the hands of the cleaning woman, who arrived every morning at seven o'clock and stayed until night. Monsieur Labbé had to do everything for her himself — dust, put her room in order, bring up her meals, and carry her from her bed to her chair and back. Twenty times a day, when he heard her signal, he rushed up his spiral stairway from the shop to the mezzanine floor. Her signal was a very special one. A cane was placed near her chair and she still had quite enough strength in her left hand to tap with it on the floor.

The little tailor went back to his work, sitting crosslegged on the table.

"Watch out, Kachoudas," he said to himself. "Twenty thousand francs are no joke, and it would be too bad to let them go. But life is worth something too, even the life of a little tailor from the wilds of Armenia. Even if the haberdasher is crazy, he can think faster than you. If he's arrested they'll probably have to let him go — for lack of proof. It's not very likely that he amuses himself by scattering bits of newspaper all over the house . . ."

It was wise to think things over unhurriedly as he sewed. Already a new idea had come to him. Some of the communications sent to the *Courrier de la Loire* were a whole page long. It must have taken hours of painstaking work to find the right words and letters, cut them out, and paste them up in order. Downstairs in the haberdashery shop Alfred, the red-headed clerk, was always about. Behind the shop there was a workshop with wooden head forms where Monsieur Labbé blocked hats, but a peep-hole with a glass window connected these two downstairs rooms. The cleaning woman reigned over the kitchen and the rest of the house, so that a process

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of elimination made it clear that the only place where the killer could devote himself to his cutting and pasting was the bedroom shared by his wife and himself, where no one was allowed to enter. Madame Labbé could not move; she could not even talk except by making a succession of weird sounds. What did she think when she saw her husband cutting out scraps of paper?

"What's more, Kachoudas, my friend, if you accuse him now and some proof of his guilt is found, those fellows (he meant the police and even his new customer, Inspector Micou) will claim that they did the whole job and take most of the reward away from you."

Fear of losing the twenty thousand francs and fear of Monsieur Labbé. The tailor was caught between these two fears. But by nine o'clock his fear of the haberdasher had almost gone. In the middle of the night the noise of water flooding the gutters, of raindrops beating on the roof and of wind whistling through the shutters, came to a sudden end. After a long fortnight the storm was miraculously over. By six in the morning there was only a drizzle of rain, silent and almost invisible to the naked eye. Now patches of the sidewalk returned to their natural gray color and people were walking around without umbrellas. It was Saturday, the weekly market day. The market occupied a little old square at the end of the street.

At nine o'clock, then, Kachoudas went downstairs, unlatched his door and started to take away the heavy dark green wood panels that protected the windows of his shop. He was carrying in the third of these panels when he heard the noise of panels of exactly the same sort coming down across the street at the haberdashery. He took care not to look around. He was not too worried because the butcher was talking from his doorstep to the shoemaker. He heard steps coming across the street and then a voice said:

"Good morning, Kachoudas."

With a panel in one hand Kachoudas managed to say in an almost natural tone of voice: "Good morning, Monsieur Labbé."

"Look here, Kachoudas . . ."

"Yes, Monsieur Labbé?"

"Has there ever been anyone crazy in your family?"

His first reaction was to dig into his memory, to think of all his uncles and aunts.

"I don't think so . . ."

There was a satisfied look on Monsieur Labbé's face, and he said just before turning around:

"That doesn't matter . . . that doesn't matter . . ."

The two men had made contact, that was all. What they had actually said was of no importance. They had exchanged a few words like the good neighbors they were. Kachoudas had not shown any fear. Wouldn't the butcher over there, who was big and strong enough to carry a hog on his shoulders, have paled if someone had said to him:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That man looking at you with those grave, dreamy eyes is the killer of the seven old women."

At the moment Kachoudas could think of nothing but the twenty thousand francs. He went back up to his low-ceilinged mezzanine workroom, climbed up on the table, and sat down to work again.

Across the street Monsieur Labbé was blocking hats. He didn't sell many new hats but his friends at the Café de la Paix had him block their old ones. Every now and then he appeared in a vest and shirt sleeves in the shop. And from time to time, when he heard his wife's signal, he dashed up the spiral staircase.

When Madame Kachoudas came back from the market and began to talk to herself in the kitchen, as she always did, there was a slight smile on the tailor's face. What was it the newspaper had said?

If we go back over the crimes one by one we shall see . . .

First of all, the article went on to say, the crimes were committed not in any particular section of the town, but at its farthest extremities. *Therefore*, the writer concluded, *the killer can go from place to place without attracting attention. This means that he is an ordinary or innocent looking man. In spite of the fact that his crimes are committed in the dark he has to walk under street lamps or in front of lighted shop windows.*

He's a man who doesn't need money, because he doesn't rob his victims.

He must be a musician, because he surprises his victims from the rear and strangles them with the string of a violin or a cello.

If we look back over the list of the women he has killed . . .

This aroused the interest of Kachoudas.

. . . we shall see that there is a certain connection among them. This isn't very easy to put a finger on. Their social status has varied. The first one was the widow of a retired army officer and the mother of two married children, living in Paris. The second kept a little dry-goods shop and her husband has a job at the Town Hall. The third . . .

A midwife, a clerk in a bookshop, a rich old lady living in a house all her own, a half-crazy woman, rich too, who wore nothing but lavender, and finally Mademoiselle Mollard, Irène Mollard, the music teacher.

Most of these women, the article continued, *were from sixty-three to sixty-five years old and all of them were natives of this town.*

The little tailor was struck by the name of Irène. One doesn't expect an old woman or an old maid to be called Irène, or Chouchou, or Lili . . . One forgets that long before she was old she was a young girl and once upon a time a little child. You see! There was nothing extraordinary about that. But while he worked on the inspector's suit Kachoudas mulled this idea over and over in his mind.

What went on, for instance, at the Café de la Paix? A dozen or so men met there every afternoon. They were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from various walks of life, most of them fairly well off, because it is normal to have attained a certain prosperity after the age of sixty. They all called each other by their first names. And not only did they call each other by their first names, but they spoke in a language all their own, with bits of slang and jokes that nobody outside the group could understand or appreciate. And this was simply because they had all gone to the same school and done their military service together. This was the reason why Kachoudas would always be treated like a stranger, why nobody asked him to take a hand at a card game unless there was no one else available. For months and months he had waited for an empty place at a card table.

"Do you see what I mean, Inspector? I'm sure that the seven victims knew each other as well as the regular customers at the Café de la Paix. It's only because old ladies don't go to cafés that they see each other less frequently. We must find out whether they weren't all friends and how often they called on one another. They were all about the same age, Inspector. Then there's one more detail that comes back to my mind; it was in the newspaper too. Each one of them was described in somewhat the same words as being *well born* and *well educated* . . ."

Of course, he wasn't talking to Inspector Micou or to any other member of the police. He had a way of talking to himself, like his wife, especially when he was happy.

"Let us imagine that we know on what basis the killer — I mean, the haberdasher — chose his victims . . ."

For he picked them out in advance — Kachoudas had witnessed that. He didn't just stroll around the streets casually in the evening and jump on the first old woman who crossed his path. The proof of this lay in the fact that he had made straight for the house where Mademoiselle Mollard (Irène) was giving a music lesson. He must have acted in the same way on previous occasions. As soon as it could be found out how he laid his plans, on what basis he drew up his list . . . Exactly! Why not? He was proceeding just as if he had drawn up a complete and definitive list. Kachoudas could imagine him coming home at night and scratching off a name.

How many old women were on the list altogether? How many women were there in the whole town between sixty-three and sixty-five years of age, *well born* and *well educated?*

Before the tailor had lunch at noon he went downstairs for a moment to get a breath of fresh air on the sidewalk and to buy some cigarettes at the corner tobacconist's. Monsieur Labbé was just coming out of his door, with his hands in his overcoat pockets. When he saw the little tailor he pulled out one of his hands and gave a friendly wave. This was the way it should be. They exchanged greetings and smiled. Probably the haberdasher had a letter in his pocket and was on his way to mail it. After

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

each murder he sent a communication to the local newspaper. The one which Kachoudas read that same evening in the *Courrier de la Loire* ran as follows:

Inspector Micou is silly to enlarge his wardrobe as if he were going to stay here months longer. Two more and I'll have finished. Greetings to my little friend across the street.

Kachoudas read the newspaper in the Café de la Paix. The inspector himself was there, somewhat concerned about the delivery of his suit when he saw that the tailor had left his work. The haberdasher was there too, playing cards with the doctor, the insurance agent, and the grocer.

Monsieur Labbé found a way of looking at Kachoudas with a smile, a smile with no reservations behind it. Perhaps he really made no reservations, but had a feeling of genuine friendship. Then the little tailor realized that the haberdasher was glad that there was at least one witness of his deeds, someone who had seen him at work. In short, someone to admire him! And he too smiled, in a slightly embarrassed manner.

"I must go work on your suit, Inspector. You can try it in an hour . . . Firmin!"

He hesitated. Yes or no? Yes! Quick, a white wine! A man who's going to make twenty thousand francs can easily afford a second glass.

The little tailor was impressed. First of all by the chimes of the doorbell, whose echoes swelled endlessly through the apparently empty building. Then by the huge gray stone façade, the closed shutters with only a pale light glimmering through them, the heavy varnished door and the polished knob. Luckily, it was no longer raining and his shoes weren't muddy.

He heard muffled steps. A grated peep-hole opened, as in a prison, and one could guess at the pale heavy face behind it by a slight noise which was caused not by chains but by a swinging rosary. Someone looked at him in silence and finally he stammered:

"May I talk to the Mother Superior?"

For a moment he was afraid and trembled. The street was deserted. He had counted on the continuation of the card game. But Monsieur Labbé might have given up his place. And Kachoudas was running a very great risk. If the haberdasher had followed him and was hidden somewhere in the shadows, he surely wouldn't hesitate, in spite of the smile of a short while ago, to add Kachoudas to the list of his victims.

"Mother Saint Ursula is in the refectory. Who shall I tell her is here?"

Good God, if only she'd open the door!

"My name wouldn't mean anything to her. Just tell her that it's something very important . . ."

The nun's muffled steps retreated into the distance and she stayed away an infinitely long time. At last she came back and released three or four well-oiled latches.

"If you'll follow me . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The air was warm, stale, and a trifle sugary. Everything was ivory color except for the black furniture. The silence was such that one could hear the ticking of several clocks, some of which must have been in rooms quite far away.

He did not dare sit down and he did not know how to behave. He had to wait for some time, and then he jumped at the sight of an elderly nun whose approach he had not noticed.

"How old is she?" he wondered, for it is hard to guess at the age of a nun beneath her white cap.

"You asked to see me?"

He had telephoned beforehand from his shop to Monsieur Cujas, the husband of the second victim, who had a job at the Town Hall. Monsieur Cujas was still there, at the "Lost and Found" office.

"Who is calling?" Monsieur Cujas shouted impatiently.

Kachoudas had to screw up his courage before answering:

"One of the detectives with Inspector Micou. Can you tell me, Monsieur Cujas, where your wife went to school?"

To the Convent of the Immaculate Conception was the answer. He might have known that, since the victim had been described as "well educated."

"I beg your pardon, Reverend Mother . . ."

He stammered, feeling more uncomfortable than he had ever felt in his life.

"I'd like to see a list of all your former pupils who might now be sixty-three or sixty-four or . . ."

"I am sixty-five years old myself . . ."

She had a smooth, rosy face and she observed him closely, toying the while with the beads of the heavy rosary that hung from her belt.

"You've had a narrow escape, Reverend Mother . . ."

This was a rather tactless remark. He was panicky. Panicky because he felt surer and surer that he would win the twenty thousand francs reward.

"Mademoiselle Mollard came to school here, didn't she?"

"She was one of our most brilliant pupils."

"And Madame Cujas?"

"Desjardins, she was called as a girl . . ."

"Tell me, Reverend Mother, if they were both in the same class . . ."

"I was in the same class myself . . . That is why, during these past few weeks . . ."

But he could not wait to hear her answer.

"If I could have a list of all the girls who were here at that time?"

"Are you from the police?"

"No, Madame . . . Reverend Mother, I mean . . . But it amounts to the same thing . . . Just imagine, I know . . ."

"What do you know?"

"That is, I think I shall know very soon . . . Do you ever go out? . . ."

"Every Monday, to the bishop's palace."

"At what time of day?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"At four o'clock."

"If you will be so kind as to make me the list . . ."

What could she be thinking? Perhaps she took him for the killer. No; she was perfectly serene.

"There aren't many of us left from that class. Quite a few have died . . . and just recently . . ."

"I know, Reverend Mother . . ."

"Only Armandine and myself . . ."

"Who is Armandine, Reverend Mother?"

"Madame d'Hauterive. You must have heard of her. The rest have left town and we haven't kept up with them. I have an idea . . . Just wait a minute . . ."

Perhaps a nun, too, enjoys a distraction from her usual routine. After an absence of only a few seconds she came back with a yellowed picture of two rows of young girls, all wearing the same uniform and the same ribbon with a medal attached to it around their necks. And pointing to a weakly looking figure, she said:

"There is Madame Labbé, the wife of the haberdasher. And this one, who's slightly cross-eyed . . ."

Mother Saint Ursula was quite right. Besides the haberdasher's wife there were only two members of the class still alive in the town: Mother Saint Ursula and Madame d'Hauterive.

"Madame Labbé is very ill. I must go call on her next Saturday. That is her birthday and a group of her old school friends have always met in her sick-room."

"Thank you, Reverend Mother."

The twenty thousand francs were his! Or at least they soon would be. Every one of the haberdasher's victims was in the photograph. And the only two still alive, besides Madame Labbé, were obviously those whom the killer had announced as his next victims.

"Thank you again, Reverend Mother. I must go immediately. Someone is waiting for me . . ."

Perhaps his behavior wasn't entirely correct; he wasn't used to convent ways. If they took him for an oaf or a madman there wasn't much he could do about it. He thanked the Mother Superior once more, bowed, backed his way out and started to run down the sidewalk outside so fast that he found it hard to slow up.

Twenty thousand francs! Twenty thousand francs they had promised for the killer, for the killer alone. Wasn't he entitled to more if he brought them a complete list of the victims, both past and future? Thanks to him two of them would survive for some years to come.

"Prove your case . . ."

What if they were to say just that?

"Prove it! Prove that these two persons were to be the next victims. What right have you to claim that a man like Monsieur Labbé planned to murder Mother Saint Ursula? What? Speak up!"

And yet only a bit of understanding was necessary. An understanding of why the haberdasher had drawn up his list in the first place.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I must go call on her next Saturday, the Mother Superior had said, speaking of Madame Labbé. *That is her birthday and a group of her old school friends have always met in her sick-room.*

Twenty thousand francs. Perhaps fifty thousand, perhaps more . . . Madame d'Hauterive was rich and when she learned that she owed her life to a little tailor with a large family . . .

His wife was waiting at the front door.

"He's upstairs."

"Who's upstairs?"

"The inspector."

"Good!" he cried, with a self-assurance to which she was not accustomed. Never had he wondered whether every man has a chance of living one glorious hour, one hour when he can live up to the best that is in him. And yet just such an hour had come.

"Good evening, Inspector. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, but I've been very busy . . ."

That was the way! He had spoken in the easy-going tone of voice of the most affluent gentlemen of the Café de la Paix. He had not forgotten the gestures natural to his profession, but he performed them with such grace that he seemed to be juggling with the unattached pieces of the inspector's suit.

"Tell me . . . The twenty thousand francs reward . . . There's no catch to it, is there?"

"Have you a little theory of your own, too?"

A little theory! A little theory, the inspector called it! When Kachoudas had seen the killer at work with his own eyes! When he knew who the next victims would be and had just this minute left the company of one of them . . . Ha! Ha! . . .

"Listen, Inspector . . . If I were quite sure about the reward . . ."

"Well, I can tell you one thing. If you want to win it you'd better hurry up . . ."

They didn't believe him. It was all a joke. They were making fun of him. The inspector added:

"There's someone waiting for me right now in my office . . . A woman . . . Apparently she claims the reward . . . They called me just now at the café."

"What's her name?" Kachoudas asked distrustfully.

"Does it interest you?"

"It isn't a nun, is it?"

"Why should it be a nun?"

"Does her last name have a *de* in it? Is her first name Armandine?"

He had no intention of letting his twenty thousand francs slip away from him.

"If she's neither one of those two, Inspector, she can only be telling you fairy-tales . . ."

Then the inspector let drop: "You ought to know who she is. She works right across the street from you . . ."

Kachoudas listened intently with a hard expression on his face.

"She's the cleaning woman of your friend the haberdasher . . ."

For at least two minutes the in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spector was left trussed up in an unfinished suit, which had only one sleeve and no collar, while the little tailor strode nervously up and down the room, and every now and then his mouth was twisted into a sarcastic smile. It was impossible. It wasn't right. He had thought of everything except that old cleaning woman. What credit did she deserve for the fact that she had access to the house and could spy on everything. She hadn't thought of the Convent of the Immaculate Conception, had she? She didn't know the names of the next victims. Well, then . . .

"Look here, Inspector . . . Supposing I tell you right away . . ."

But what about proofs? Always that confounded matter of proofs! And to think that the cleaning woman *might* have proofs, even if they were only scraps of paper she had picked out of the garbage can.

"It's only fair, when all's said and done, that the first-comer should have the reward, isn't it?"

"Of course."

The light was on across the street, as it always was at this hour. It made only a vague circle behind the lace curtains, but one could guess at the shape of Madame Labbé's chair and her motionless white face.

"Saturday is her birthday . . ."

"What's that?"

"Never mind . . . Saturday the sixty-three to sixty-five year old survivors are scheduled to meet in her sick-room and . . ."

This was not Kachoudas' hour of glory, it was his exact minute. He must hurry, on account of the cleaning woman.

"Listen, my man . . ."

"Twenty thousand francs, then?"

"Yes, if you . . ."

If he could prove it, of course.

"Look here . . ."

Kachoudas picked up the heavy scissors with which he had cut the cloth that was now draped so strangely around the inspector. He opened the window and made a desperate gesture, hurling the scissors straight at the window on the other side of the street.

Then he stood perfectly still, quivering inside. The glass had shattered with a tremendous noise. He had to catch his breath before a smile came over his face, a triumphant smile that a little tailor of his kind can afford only once in a lifetime. Across the street he and the inspector could see in the chair of the haberdasher's invalid wife only a wooden head on top of a pile of rags.

"Tell me, Madame . . ."

"Mademoiselle, if you please . . ."

A sour old thing, Monsieur Labbé's cleaning woman! They had brought her over from the police station and as soon as she saw her employer in handcuffs she knew that she was too late.

"You knew that Madame Labbé was dead, did you?"

"I was sure of it."

"For how long a time?"

"Months and months. I was sure, that is, without really knowing . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What do you mean?"

"Well, mostly on account of the fish . . ."

"What fish?"

"All kinds of fish, herrings, halibut, cod . . . She couldn't eat fish."

"Why not?"

"Fish upset her. Lots of people are like that. I had to be very brave, I can tell you. If I don't get at least a share of the twenty thousand francs, then there's no justice . . ."

Kachoudas stirred in his corner, but the inspector made a reassuring sign in his direction.

"What was that about the fish?"

"Well, one day when I had cooked some fish for him and I wanted to send up some meat to his wife, he told me that I needn't bother. He took all her meals to her, you know, and kept her room in order. Then there was the string . . ."

"What string?"

"The string I found last week when I was cleaning up his workshop. He never wanted me to go in there, but I made up my mind to do it while he was away, because there was such a bad smell. Back of the hats I found a string hanging from the ceiling. He pulled on that to make the same noise that his wife used to make when she tapped with her cane on the floor. As for the twenty thousand francs, I'm going to see a lawyer . . ."

Kachoudas almost rose again. Monsieur Labbé gave a dignified smile.

"So first of all you killed your wife . . ."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You strangled her the same way you did the others . . ."

"Not the same way, Inspector. With my hands. She was suffering too much . . ."

"Or rather, you were tired of looking after her . . ."

"As you like . . ."

"Then you began to kill off your wife's friends. Why? And why in such rapid successions?"

Kachoudas raised his hand as if he were at school.

"Because of the birthday!" he shouted.

"Quiet, please," said the inspector. "Let Monsieur Labbé talk . . ."

Monsieur Labbé nodded approvingly at the little tailor.

"Exactly. He's quite right. They all had to be killed by next Saturday . . ."

And he winked at Kachoudas. There was no doubt about it: he winked at him as if he were an accomplice. It was just as if he were saying:

"They'll always blunder along. But we two — we understand each other . . ."

And the little tailor, who had just won his twenty thousand francs, could not help smiling back.

. . . *for they shall inherit the earth.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Rainbow Murders continue . . . Two issues ago you met Jo Gar, the Filipino detective, as he started on his criminological crusade — to recover the ten Von Loffler diamonds stolen from Delgado's jewelry store in Manila. Ten rainbow diamonds worth $200,000 — and the whole Orient a blind alley, a dead end. But even more than the diamonds Jo Gar wanted the killers who went with them.

"The Rainbow Murders" is not a serial: although connected by a central theme, each tale stands on its own feet and can be read independently of the others. At the close of the preceding story Jo Gar heard a dying man say: "The blind Chinese — Honolulu — you can find . . ."

You can find — what? The Rainbow Diamonds? Join Jo on the cool veranda of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and find out — in the rough, tough style of the hardboiled school which so often winds up in a blaze of gory glory . . .

YELLOW DEATH

by RAOUL WHITFIELD

IT WAS just a little time after dusk. There was a crescent moon half hidden by the jagged peak of the Pali; a cool breeze blew through the garden not far from the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. Jo Gar relaxed in the wicker chair in which his diminutive body rested. But his gray-blue eyes were alert; they watched the mild ones of Benfeld, the Honolulu representative of the Dutch Insurance Company. Benfeld sipped his cool drink and said with a slight English accent:

"Herr Von Loffler cabled me about the theft of the Rainbow diamonds. It was in code and therefore quite safe. We are interested, of course. My home company insured the diamonds. A terrible crime."

Jo nodded his head. "The murders were incidental," he said in his toneless voice. "The one who planned the robbery perhaps thought it could be accomplished without a killing. He was mistaken. Delgado's son was murdered in the jewelry store. There was the bank guard, who was killed outside. And then Juan Arragon, my friend, who was in pursuit. An attempt was made to murder the American chief of police. In Manila he is not too well liked. I was forced to shoot a Malay, and he spoke of a 'man in white — who walks badly.' I traced such a man aboard the *Cheyo Maru*."

Benfeld said grimly: "And you were forced to shoot him to death. But you learned something."

Jo Gar widened his eyes slightly. He

Copyright, 1937, by Raoul Whitfield

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had only told the insurance representative certain things, not too much.

"Very little," he corrected.

Benfeld shrugged. He was a tall man, with a long face and blond hair.

"You recovered one of the diamonds," he said.

Jo Gar sighed a little. He smiled and straightened in his wicker. Palm trees swayed beyond the garden, and yet Honolulu was not like Manila. It was cooler, less tropical in a sense.

"Señor Ferraro was a fool," he said placidly. "The Malay who spoke of him might have thought he was the important one of the bandits. But he was not. Perhaps he talked with the Malay, who I think was one of the robbers. But Ferraro was given only one of the ten Von Loffler stones."

Benfeld relighted a thin cigar and nodded his long head very slowly.

"And you have said he tried to murder you, on the *Cheyo Maru*," he said.

The Island detective nodded. "In Manila — many people have tried to murder me," he said simply. "The stolen diamonds are worth more than two hundred thousand dollars. There was a diamond expert on the boat, by chance. He has valued the diamond I recovered from this Ferraro in excess of twenty thousand dollars. It is one of the Von Loffler stones, of course. I think, had Ferraro succeeded in murdering me, he would have received another."

There was a flickering light in Benfeld's eyes. He said very softly:

"Who would have given it to him, Señor Gar?"

Jo Gar got a brown-paper cigarette from a pocket of his light-colored suit coat. He smiled with his almond-shaped eyes almost closed.

"Ferraro died during the fourth day out from Manila," he said very softly. "I spent the remaining days in attempting to associate him with some other person on the boat. It was a failure."

Benfeld frowned. Gray smoke curled upward from his thin lips. He was silent for several seconds.

"Then, as it stands, Señor Gar —" he said thoughtfully — "you have recovered one of the Von Loffler stones. You are thousands of miles from Manila. And you have completely lost the trail of the others."

Jo Gar closed his eyes. It was peculiar — the way Benfeld regarded the situation. It was almost as though the Dutch insurance representative were pleased. He was certainly extremely inquisitive. He *had* received a cable from Von Loffler, there was no doubt about it. And Jo considered that the German owner of the nine missing diamonds had been foolish, even though he had sent the message in code. But then, this man seated across from him represented the company that had insured the diamonds. That company would suffer a severe loss if they were not recovered.

He had not answered Benfeld's question — the long-faced one said quietly:

"Of course, I understand that your

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

friend was murdered. Juan Arragon. And also that Señor Delgado wishes to bring to justice the person that murdered his son. And already you have recovered one diamond. But the trail —"

His voice died away; he frowned and shrugged. Jo Gar opened his eyes and smiled at the Dutchman.

"The trail is lost," he said simply. "There are nine diamonds still missing. They are worth almost two hundred thousand dollars."

Benfeld cleared his throat and said in a tone that was so careless Jo noticed it:

"If this Ferraro — had only spoken, before he died!"

Jo Gar inhaled smoke from his brown-paper cigarette. He lifted his glass with stubby, brown fingers. He sipped a little of the cool liquid.

"It would have helped — very much," he said simply.

He looked towards the swaying palm trees and remembered the words that Señor Ferraro had used. Benfeld did not know of those words, and he would not know of them. The man was getting at something.

The Dutchman shook his head and sighed heavily. He said:

"The company will investigate, of course. But it will be very difficult, I fear. And what are *your* plans, Señor Gar?"

Jo Gar shrugged. "The *Cheyo Maru* remains in port until noon tomorrow," he said. "She will be in San Francisco within six days. I shall make the voyage aboard her. Only a few passengers disembarked here — and I have made quite certain they are not involved."

Benfeld said slowly: "Of course, you have had much time to learn who was landing."

Again there was the peculiar tone of his voice. It was almost as though he were slightly amused. But the next second he was frowning, shaking his long head.

"The nine Von Loffler stones!" he murmured. "And diamonds are so simple — to hide away."

Jo Gar nodded and said wearily: "It will be good to sleep on shore tonight. Ship travel tires me. I think I shall retire, after a brief drive about."

He waited for the obvious offer. But it did not come. Benfeld lived in Honolulu; he had brought Jo to this garden from the small hotel in which he had taken a room. Yet he was not offering to drive him about for a short time.

Jo Gar waited in silence. Finally Benfeld said:

"I was trying to think of some way — I have an engagement it will not be possible for me to break —"

The Island detective said protestingly: "Do not even consider it."

Benfeld said suddenly: "Of course, I have it! You will use my car. I shall get other conveyance. In the morning we shall meet again."

He smiled cheerfully. Jo Gar protested. But Benfeld would not listen to him.

"Better still —" he said, and his voice died away as he frowned

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thoughtfully. Then he said with a smile: "I have two cars. You will remain here, Señor Gar — and I will drive to my appointment. It is a monthly affair, an important one. I will then send my chauffeur to you, with the other car, the open one. I will drive my own, when I return home, which will be late. In the morning I will come to your hotel."

Jo Gar bowed a little. "You are very good," he said softly. "You are very kind."

Benfeld glanced at his wrist watch and rose to his feet. He called a Chinese waiter and insisted upon paying for the drinks. Jo Gar rose and they shook hands. Jo said:

"Of course you realize you must be discreet about this affair —"

Benfeld said sharply: "Of course, Señor Gar. I think you have done very well. I will have my chauffeur return here within twenty minutes, say. You will not be too chilled in an open car?"

The Island detective shook his head. "I would like an open machine," he replied. "It is very good of you."

Benfeld smiled. "You will be able to see more of the Island," he said. He bowed. "Until tomorrow, then."

Jo Gar bowed a little. "Until tomorrow," he agreed.

The Dutchman went slowly from the garden, towards the palm-studded street. He walked erectly, with his shoulders thrown back. He bowed to two men seated at a small table in the garden. Then he was lost from sight behind a high, tropical hedge. Jo Gar reseated himself and called the waiter.

"Iced claret," he ordered.

He slumped in the wicker and watched the crests of the palms sway in the breeze. It was true that he was many miles from Manila. But other things were not so true. Perhaps he had lost the trail of the remaining nine Von Loffler diamonds — perhaps not. The thing that Benfeld did not know was that Señor Ferraro had used a few words, lying on the floor of his cabin on the *Cheyo Maru*. Most men, when they felt death coming close, used words. And Ferraro had said: "*The blind Chinese — Honolulu — you can find —*"

That was all he had said. And in the city of Honolulu, with a tremendous Chinese population, there would be more than one Chinese who was blind. But that did not mean that the trail was lost.

The waiter brought the iced claret. Jo Gar sipped it and smoked another cigarette. He thought:

The Dutchman, he is well established here. He perhaps has a fine reputation. But why did he question me so? And he has not a poker face. He is not experienced in these things. There is much that he would like to know, yet he has an important engagement. And my boat is sailing at noon tomorrow.

Jo smiled a little with his lips pressed together.

"And he feels I would enjoy riding in an open machine," he murmured softly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Music from a stringed orchestra reached his ears. It was the soft, lazy music of the Hawaiians. The Manila detective nodded his head very slowly.

"There is a possibility" — he half whispered, looking down at his drink — "that he is correct. I shall very soon see."

Some twenty minutes later a waiter came to Jo Gar's table and said that his car was just beyond the garden. Jo thanked him and paid for the drink. He went slowly to the street in which the palms rose. The car was a short distance from the garden entrance. It was a small car, well polished. It seemed of an old make. The driver was a short Chinese. He wore a white coat that was several sizes too large for him, no hat. His trousers were not so clean as his coat. He smiled, showing broken yellow teeth, and bowed awkwardly.

"Señor Gar?" he asked.

Jo frowned. He thought first that Benfeld was a fool, using his name to a servant. And then he smiled with his eyes. He nodded.

"Yes," he said in English. "You are Señor Benfeld's chauffeur?"

He spoke slowly and clearly. The Chinese nodded his head. He said:

"It is so — I am — chauffeur."

Jo Gar nodded. He looked into the rear of the open car. The seat was clean, but the floor mat was not so clean. The top was back, and the sides of the car were low. It was not unlike many other cars Jo had noticed — cars that were hired out to tourists on the Island.

He stepped inside as the driver held the door open. He said:

"I do not care to go far from the heart of the city. Along the beach, and past the old Palace of the —"

He checked himself. The chauffeur was trying desperately to understand his English. He had spoken fast, but not too fast. And this man had spoken first in English.

Jo Gar sighed a little. He said very slowly:

"We will go — where you wish. You have been told — where to take me?"

The driver's face lighted. He jerked his head up and down, showing his broken teeth again.

"Me told — what do," he said cheerfully. "Me know — where go."

Jo smiled and nodded. The driver got into the front seat. When the car moved forward it jerked and made much noise. It reminded Jo of the car owned by himself, back in Manila. And the chauffeur was hardly the sort one might expect Benfeld to have.

The Island detective sat back in the seat. The streets were not too well lighted; as the car moved along, the lights grew fewer, and there were not so many hotels. The foliage was thicker. There was a cross-roads ahead, and Jo was sufficiently familiar with Honolulu to know that the beach was to the right. But the driver turned the car jerkily to the left. The road grew narrower, and the houses far apart. There was the sweet odor of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the foliage, and in the distance the slopes of mountains.

Jo Gar leaned forward and said above the clatter of the machine:

"I would prefer — the beach road —"

The driver jerked his head a little and nodded. He said in a shrill, raised tone:

"Me come — back along beach. He tell me — go by mountain road first —"

Jo Gar sat back in the seat and got his Colt from the holster under his left thigh. He smiled a little, but it was a grim smile. Once he turned in the rear seat, raised himself slightly and glanced behind. There were no lights of another car, but he was not reassured. The road on which they were driving was growing narrower. It was rough, and there were no shoulders.

Suddenly the headlights went out. They came on again almost instantly, then were extinguished. Jo's body was rigid; he could see that the driver was leaning forward slightly, back of the wheel. The lights flashed on. The car was moving slowly up a fairly steep grade. Foliage was thick on both sides of the road.

The Island detective leaned forward and called sharply:

"You have trouble — with the lights?"

The Chinese jerked his head around, nodded. His almond-shaped eyes held a hard expression; they seemed to glitter. His lips were drawn back. The car slowed down, halted. The Chinese used the emergency brake gratingly. He turned his head all the way and said shrilly:

"Him go bad. You wait — me fix."

He slid from the seat back of the wheel, got to the left side of the car. He went swiftly towards the headlights, which seemed to be showing dimly. Jo Gar was leaning forward in the seat, his gray-blue eyes narrowed.

He heard the other machine before he saw it. There was the roar of an engine — the car seemed to be speeding up the far side of the slope on which the car in which Jo was seated was resting. There were no lights, but the engine roar was increasing in sound.

The Chinese heard the roar, too. He stood near the lights, his small body rigid. He called shrilly:

"Me need — stick. Me get — him!"

His body swung around, he moved towards the right side of the road, the thick foliage. As he neared it there was a flare of light beyond the crest of the slope. Headlights of the approaching car had been suddenly switched on. But they slanted high, above the standing car and above the road.

The Chinese driver's body crashed through the foliage; his back was turned to Jo as he went into it. The Island detective moved with surprising swiftness. In a flash he was out of the car. He ran, in darkness, his small body bent low, to the left side of the road, dived into the thick foliage. Branches and leaves struck against his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

outflung arms. He went to his knees, let his body drop flat. Back of him the road was suddenly yellow-white with the glare from headlights.

There was the increasing roar of the car engine. And then the staccato beat of the guns. Metal made sound, and there was the shattering sound of glass. The air was filled with the clatter — Jo Gar could hear the bullets pounding into the body of the car.

The engine roar had diminished momentarily. Now it increased in volume. The clatter of the guns died away. There had certainly been more than one gun, and they had been machine-guns. Few bullets had missed the car in which he had been seated.

The engine roar became a hum as the car from which the bullets had been loosed sped back towards the heart of Honolulu. Jo Gar lay motionless, listening to the decreasing sound. His Colt was gripped in the fingers of his outflung right hand.

He moved about very quietly, pulling his body nearer the road and parting the foliage a little. He could see the machine now. There was light from the stars and crescent moon. The windshield was shattered, both headlights had been shot out. He could see bullet marks along the side facing him. The rear, left tire was flat.

In the distance the engine of the departing car was making only a faint hum sound. Jo Gar smiled with his lips and kept narrowed eyes on the foliage ahead of the bullet-filled car, across the road. He half whispered:

"Machine-guns in Manila. And now here. Methods of the western world, these are!"

There was faint sound from the foliage across the road. He saw the short figure of the Chinese chauffeur appear, crawling. The man glanced towards the car, then slowly straightened his body. For several seconds he stood motionlessly, looking towards the battered machine. Then his head turned, he glanced in each direction, along the road. He listened intently.

There was no sound of another car. The hum of the speeding one had died away. Jo Gar guessed that the spot was a deserted one, one from which the noise of the machine-guns would not reach habitation.

The Chinese chauffeur moved slowly into the rough-surfaced, dirt road. He stood for a few seconds in front of the car, then walked around it. He stood with his back to Jo as the Island detective rose and lifted his Colt a little. The Chinese moved closer to the car, getting up on his toes and peering towards the floor at the rear.

Jo Gar stepped from the foliage to the road-bed. There was crackling sound as he did so, and the driver's body swung around. His eyes went wide with fear as he stared at Jo. His breath made a whistling sound and he cried out shrilly in his native tongue.

Jo said quietly: "I was not — in the machine, you see."

He smiled a little. The Chinese was staring at the gun now. His lips were drawn back from his teeth; his face was a mask of fear. Jo said:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I think — you must die — for what you have done."

He moved the gun up a little, and forward. The chauffeur started shrilling words in his native tongue. His body was shaking. Jo said:

"Stop it! You are not Benfeld's chauffeur. This is not Benfeld's car. It is a hired car. Perhaps your car. Will you answer my questions?"

The Chinese was staring at him. He jerked his head up and down.

The Island detective said slowly: "You will certainly die, if you do not answer me truthfully. Who were those in the machine that just passed? Those who used the guns?"

The Chinese shook his head. Jo Gar smiled with his almond-shaped eyes almost closed. He repeated the question in stilted Chinese, a tongue with which he had difficulty, in spite of his many years in Manila.

The driver said: "Me — not know!"

Jo Gar said, moving a little closer to the chauffeur:

"The Dutchman, Benfeld — he went to you and paid you money. Very good money. He told you that you were to act as his chauffeur. He furnished you with a new coat, though there was no time to make it fit. He told you where to drive me and how to signal with your headlights. He said you must then stop the car — and hide yourself. Is this not so?"

He had spoken very slowly and clearly. The chauffeur nodded his head. He said:

"He do not — tell me more."

Jo Gar nodded and smiled grimly. He was thinking that Benfeld had taken a big chance. And yet, he had almost succeeded. There had been only a few seconds' time between life and death — for Señor Gar.

The Island detective stopped smiling. He moved his gun hand a little.

"I think you must die," he said steadily. "You would have killed me —"

The Chinese shook his head and shrilled words. After a few seconds he spoke more slowly. He said that he did not know that the big guns were to fire into the car. He did not know what had been about to happen. He was a poor man, and Benfeld had offered him much money.

Jo Gar cut him off, after a little time.

"I will give you a chance," he said slowly. "There is a person I wish to see. He is Chinese. And he is — blind."

He saw instantly that the chauffeur knew of such a man. And he saw that the man was of importance. But the driver shook his head.

"There are — more than one — blind Chinese in —"

Jo Gar interrupted again. "There is *one* of some importance," he said. "Think carefully. Perhaps this one has a place where dishonest men go. Perhaps he is not a good person. Think well, for you are young to die."

He spoke very slowly, and with no smile on his face. He held his Colt low

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and slightly forward of his right side.

The Chinese driver stared at him wildly. But he did not speak. Jo Gar said:

"Very well — I shall find him alone. But first I must silence you, so that you do not again interfere with me."

The chauffeur threw out his hands. They were browned, and the fingers were jerking, twisting. He said:

"I know — him! I go — his place —"

Jo Gar lowered his Colt slightly. He nodded his head and smiled. His voice was almost toneless when he spoke.

"You are wise — we shall go there together. We shall walk to a spot where perhaps we may obtain a ride. You will do as I say, and if you make one, slight mistake —"

He moved the Colt a little. The Chinese driver's facial muscles were twisting. He was breathing quickly. He said:

"Tan Ying — he is very bad. Even if he does — not see —"

Jo Gar nodded. "Many men are very bad," he philosophized quietly. "But after they are *dead* — how do we know what then happens?"

The driver half-closed his staring eyes. He said in a shrill, shaken tone:

"If I take you to the place — they will kill me."

Jo Gar shrugged. "And if you do *not* take me — *I* will kill you," he said. "It is a difficult position."

The driver said: "I am a poor man —"

The Island detective nodded. "Then you have less to live for," he replied. "Let us start."

The hour was almost midnight when Jo Gar and the Chinese chauffeur moved through the teeming streets of the Honolulu Chinese quarter. There was the sound of discordant music — the shrill, reedy notes that came down from rooms beyond balconies. The section was well lighted in spots, very poorly lighted in others. Jo Gar kept his body close to that of the chauffeur, and his Colt within the right pocket of his light suit coat. At intervals he let the weapon press against the chauffeur's side.

They turned suddenly into a narrow alley that wound from the lighted street. There were few lights in the alley, the section was very quickly a poor one. The shops were squalid and dirty; no music came down from the rooms beyond the balconies.

The street curved more sharply at the far end. The Chinese at Jo's side said thickly:

"It is — there —"

He pointed towards a narrow entrance, an oblong cut in unpainted wood. Strips on which letters were scrawled in Chinese, hung on either side of the entrance. Streamers of painted beads hung from the bamboo pole at the top of the entrance; they obscured the store beyond.

Jo said softly: "You will go — first —"

The driver's face was twisted, but he forced a smile as his browned hands shoved aside the beads. They made a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rattling sound; Jo followed into the shop. A kerosene light made odor and gave little flare. There was the usual musty, aged smell of such shops. Baskets were about, with nuts in them — and jars contained brightly colored candy. There were shelves with boxes marked with Chinese lettering.

No one was about, but at the rear of the store was another bead curtain. The Chinese driver glanced towards it. Jo Gar said in a half-whisper:

"Do as you — were told."

The chauffeur raised his voice and called in a shrill voice:

"Tan Ying!"

A quavering voice replied, from the room beyond the second curtain. It said:

"Welcome, Dave Chang!"

Jo Gar smiled grimly. The Americanization of the Chinese never failed to amuse him. He touched Chang lightly and pointed towards the beads of the curtain.

The chauffeur said in Chinese: "You are alone, Tan Ying?"

Ying replied that he was alone. He asked that the driver would enter his humble abode. Chang moved towards the beaded curtain and Jo Gar followed him. He was very close to him as they passed through the beaded curtain into the rear room. Two kerosene lamps were burning, but there was a clutter of objects in the place. Buddha's figure was in a corner; the light from the nearer lamp struck the face from an angle, making the figure seem very life-like.

Tan Ying was an aged Chinese. He sat cross-legged, but there was some object against which his back rested. He was obese and fat-faced. His eyes were open but sightless. They shone whitely as he stared towards Chang. It was almost as though he were inspecting the chauffeur.

Jo Gar stepped soundlessly to one side of the beaded curtain. He took his Colt from his right-hand pocket, held it low at his side. He breathed as quietly as possible. But it was not enough. Tan Ying said quietly, steadily:

"You are not alone, Dave Chang."

He spoke in his native tongue, and Chang sucked in his breath sharply. He twisted his head and looked at Jo. The Island detective smiled and nodded.

Chang said: "It is my Spanish friend, Mendez. He has arrived on the boat today."

The blind Chinese nodded his fat face. His face was expressionless, except that his sightless eyes gave it a strange intenseness. He said:

"Welcome, Señor Mendez!"

Jo Gar spoke in Spanish. "You are good to welcome me, Tan Ying."

The Chinese smiled; he was almost toothless. The wick in one of the kerosene lamps was low; it flickered now and then. There was a little silence. Then Jo Gar said to the chauffeur, in Chinese:

"Will you speak of the business?"

The chauffeur's body stiffened. He said very softly:

"You are expecting the Dutchman, Tan Ying?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tan Ying's fat body rocked a little from side to side. His lips tightened. He said:

"Why do you speak of him?"

Jo Gar said: "It is because I am to meet him — in Honolulu, Tan Ying. That is the reason."

The lips of the fat Chinese relaxed a little. A clock chimed, and Tan Ying listened to it. He said, after a little silence following the chimes:

"The Dutchman — he is late."

Jo Gar sighed a little. He moved his body and turned so that when Benfeld came in he could easily cover him with his weapon. The driver was looking at him with tortured eyes; Chang was feeling fear.

The blind Chinese said suddenly, in very precise English:

"It has gone well, Dave Chang?"

Jo Gar felt his body stiffen. The driver nodded his head, and looked at Jo again. The Island detective nodded and smiled.

Chang said: "It has gone well, Tan Ying."

The blind Chinese smiled again. His body continued to rock from side to side. There was a small screen near the print-covered wall at Jo's back. It was perhaps four feet high, and as many long. It was within several feet of the wall. Jo Gar moved quietly to it, stood close to it. He raised his gun a little and nodded at Dave Chang.

The chauffeur hesitated. Jo Gar's face grew hard; he narrowed his gray-blue eyes. Chang said:

"Señor Mendez will be of use to the Dutchman, Tan Ying."

The blind Chinese stopped swaying. He said in his native tongue:

"It may be so."

There was the sound of beads rattling, at the entrance of the shop. The blind Chinese stiffened, and Dave Chang half turned his body. Jo Gar raised his weapon, leveled it at the chauffeur. Then he stepped behind the screen and bent downward. He got his right eye near a section crack. There was little light on the screen. From the outer room there was the sound of tapping. He counted a half-dozen taps; they were soft and well spaced.

The blind Chinese raised his voice and said: "It is the way of the western lands —"

There was the sound of footfalls. The beads of the inner curtain rattled and Benfeld came into the room. He straightened, looked sharply about. He said in a hard tone, in English:

"You — Chang — what was it that happened?"

The blind Chinese said softly: "Dave Chang — he has told me it is well."

Benfeld said fiercely in English: "He lied! When we got back there, after ten minutes, there was no body in the car. You — Chang —"

The chauffeur said hoarsely, fear in his voice:

"I do not know — what happened! I did as I was told. I signaled with the lights, and when I saw the beam of your car — I ran to the foliage. When I returned, there was no sign of Señor Gar. I swear it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Benfeld said grimly: "What did you do? Why didn't you stay near the car?"

Chang replied in a shrill tone: "I was frightened. One of the bullets from your machine — it almost struck me. I went into the foliage, wandered around. Then I remembered that we were to be here at twelve."

Benfeld drew a deep breath. He kept his right hand out of sight in the pocket of a light coat he was wearing. He had on a soft hat, pulled low over his face.

The blind Chinese was muttering to himself. He stopped it and said:

"Señor Mendez is here, you see."

There was a little silence. Jo Gar watched Benfeld stare about the room. There was a puzzled expression on the Dutchman's face.

The right pocket of his coat moved a little. There was fear in Chang's eyes, but he did not look towards the screen. Jo Gar's body was tense, but he waited. Benfeld said in English:

"What is this? What do you mean?"

The blind Chinese seemed to sense that something was wrong. His head did not move, but he spoke very softly and very calmly.

"Dave Chang — he brought with him Señor Mendez. I have spoken with him, but a few minutes ago. Chang said that he would be of use to you."

With his one eye back of the section crack, Jo Gar watched Benfeld move away from the chauffeur. He saw the glint of steel as the Dutchman's gun came out of his pocket. Chang was breathing rapidly; fear was gripping him. Benfeld's eyes went about the room in a swift glance. The low-wicked lamp sent light wavering over the walls.

Benfeld said: "By God, Chang — you've tricked us —"

The Chinese chauffeur said in a shrill voice:

"No — it is not so! I have not —"

Jo Gar raised his Colt and got the muzzle within a half inch of the section crack. Benfeld was in a line, but beyond the Chinese chauffeur. He had his long face lowered a little; his eyes were slitted on Chang's. He said:

"By God — you have. I've told you too much. I've been a fool. But I've got you — in here. Gar had those diamonds on him. He got them from Ferraro. He lied to me. You took them from him —"

The blind Chinese said in his native tongue, his voice calm:

"Be careful — there is this Mendez —"

Benfeld's eyes went around the room again. He said savagely:

"There's no one else in here. If Chang said there was — he was lying to you, Ying. Or else he was —"

The chauffeur said in a shrill voice:

"I did not — steal the diamonds! That is not so — do not shoot —"

A knife was suddenly in the right hand of the seated Chinese. He held it out, his sightless eyes gazing straight ahead. He said calmly:

"Be careful — is not a knife better?"

Benfeld said in a low, hoarse voice:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I tell you — Señor Gar had the diamonds. He lied to me. Was I not informed that Ferraro was bringing them? Gar lied. Either he was trying to get away with them, or he wants them for himself. And you —"

The chauffeur said shrilly: "When I reached my car — he was not there —"

Jo Gar watched Benfeld, with thoughts running through his brain. Benfeld figured that *he* had the diamonds, had gotten them from Ferraro and had lied to him. But did that mean that Ferraro had had more than one stone? Did it mean that someone on the *Cheyo Maru* had received the others, after all? Had Ferraro lied to him, dying?

Benfeld was staring at Dave Chang. He said very quietly:

"Why did you say Mendez was here? Why did you tell Tan Ying that?"

Jo Gar held his breath. He expected Chang to break any second now, to fail under the strain. He was between two guns, and he knew it. Jo had already gotten information from him; he had spoken of Mendez, and Jo Gar had forced him to use the name. The chauffeur was in a tight spot, but surely he must realize that if Jo Gar were to go down under the lead from Benfeld's gun — he would have a better chance. He had talked, because Jo had forced him to talk. But with the Island detective dead —

Tan Ying said in the same passive voice: "The knife — it is better."

The body of the blind Chinese was swaying again. Benfeld said in a harsh voice:

"Very well — throw it at my feet, Tan Ying."

The knife fell several feet from Benfeld, but the judgment of the blind man was not bad. Benfeld glanced down at it, but did not move.

"Why did you say that Mendez was here?" he asked again.

The blind Chinese said steadily:

"You do not hear me, Benfeld. I tell you someone — *was* here! I talked with him —"

The eyes of Benfeld were slitted on the screen now. Jo Gar held the muzzle of his gun steady. The chauffeur said weakly:

"It was Mendez — we met in the Street of the Lanterns. He was coming —"

Benfeld swore hoarsely. "Then where is he now?" he asked very slowly.

The Chinese driver made a little movement of his left hand. A browned finger pointed towards the screen. He said at the same instant:

"I do not know — he went out —"

The gun in the hand of Benfeld slanted a little. Jo Gar looked at it, squeezed the trigger of his Colt. When the gun jerked and the room filled with sound, he hurled his body to one side.

The bullet from Benfeld's gun struck the wood of the screen, and then the wall back of it. Jo Gar pulled himself to his feet and swung around. Benfeld was sinking to the floor — he half raised his weapon. The blind

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chinese said in a high-pitched voice:

"Dog of a —"

Benfeld's gun crashed again. The aged Chinese screamed and pitched forward. The gun dropped from Benfeld's right hand. He said thickly:

"The dead — do not — talk —"

His right hand reached out and groped for the knife the blind Chinese had tossed near him. Jo Gar said sharply: "No —"

But it was Dave Chang who suddenly moved forward, bent down. He was screaming shrill words that had little meaning. His right-hand fingers were almost on the hilt of the knife when Benfeld gripped him, pulled him down. With a sudden, last strength the Dutchman raised the knife and struck. Jo Gar fired again, as the Chinese chauffeur groaned and rolled on his back.

Benfeld sat up a little and stared at him. There was red on his lips.

"Dead men — do not — talk —" he repeated weakly.

He lowered his head into outstretched arms and shivered a little. Then his body was motionless.

Jo Gar went to him first. He was dead. The knife had struck into the chauffeur's throat. He was trying to mouth words, but they did not come. And Jo Gar knew that they would never come again. He turned towards the blind Chinese. But he knew before he touched him that the man was dead.

There was a babble of voices beyond the two curtains of painted beads. Jo Gar went swiftly into the outer room. He thought, for a second, of trying to get away.

But already the crowd was thick, and there would be the police. He would be seen trying to get away, and there would be difficulties. It would be better to work *with* the police, to attempt explanation.

He lighted a brown-paper cigarette and leaned against the counter. Faces were beyond the beads that rattled from hands that swayed them. Benfeld had expected the diamonds to be brought to him. They had not come. He had thought that Jo possessed them. The blind Chinese had known things — and the driver of the car riddled with bullets had known something. Dying, Benfeld had silenced them both. Even at the end, he was protecting someone.

The Island detective moved his lips a little. He said questioningly: "Who is — Mendez?"

When the first of the police entered the shop, Jo Gar had almost finished his brown-paper cigarette. The police officer was small and brown-faced. He was breathing heavily. He said:

"What — is it?"

Jo Gar gestured towards the second beaded curtain, and the room beyond it. He said in a tone that was weary:

"It is — death."

The police officer said: "Robbery?"

Jo Gar smiled with his eyes looking towards the curtain, shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"Perhaps," he said simply. "But very surely it is death — yellow death."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A. E. W. Mason died on November 22, 1948 at the age of eighty-three. He was one of the grand old men of the English detective story. Creator of Hanaud, the burly and impish-humored composite of Goron and Masset, successive chiefs of the Sûreté-Générale, Mr. Mason left behind at least two acknowledged classics. His AT THE VILLA ROSE, *which introduced Hanaud to the world, appeared in 1910; and fourteen years later* THE HOUSE OF THE ARROW *brought Hanaud to the peak of his development, both as a character and a sleuth. Indeed, there is hardly a list of The Ten Most Important Detective Novels of All Time which fails to include one book or the other —* AT THE VILLA ROSE *for its priority and historical significance, and* THE HOUSE OF THE ARROW *for its sheer quality and the extraordinary brilliance of its main clue.*

A. E. W. Mason gave the detective story a much needed "lift." He turned his back, forty years ago, on the already solidly established tradition of the Holmesian private investigator, and delineated an authentic police detective; he gave to the full-length detective story the richness, breadth, and stature of the serious novel; and he substituted for mechanics, however ingenious, the larger implications of psychological action and reaction.

And despite the fact that the short story presents a smaller canvas, he adhered faithfully to his basic principles even within the limitations of the shorter form. You will find in "The Italian" a realistic professional detective — Graham Buckland, surgeon of police; a wealth of detail in the characterization and background — the serious, literate approach; and in Buckland's words, "as grim and strange a crime as you and I have ever known" — stemming from a deep understanding on Mr. Mason's part of the psychological motives which drive certain people to certain doom.

THE ITALIAN

by A. E. W. MASON

"I AM sorry, Mrs. Quintash," said Police-Inspector Grant. "Our presence is, of course, very distressing, but your parlormaid, Martha, acted very sensibly when she called us in. You will be free of us all the sooner."

"I don't blame her at all," answered Doria Quintash.

Grant was a large, kindly, middle-aged man, with a dread of emotional scenes which not even his long experience had been able to remove. He was very grateful to Mrs. Quintash for the steadiness of her voice and the quietude of her manner. She was a young woman, trim and complete

Copyright, 1926, 1927, 1930, 1933, 1934, 1935, by Alfred Edward Woodley Mason

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

even at this moment. She might be beautiful, the Inspector conjectured, to those who liked something a bit foreign. For himself he preferred the English type, fair, and a trifle buxom perhaps. Doria Quintash had a clear pale face, which at this hour seemed to be owned and occupied by a big, clear pair of eyes black as night, rather full, red lips, and black, shining hair most neatly parted in the middle and sweeping down in great curves to hide all but the lobes of the ears. She was seated at a gilt table covered with a red silk cloth fringed with little red balls; and in front of her was a cup of tea and a plate of buttered toast.

"While you go on with your breakfast, Mrs. Quintash," said the Inspector, "I'll read out to you the report I'm making, and by the time I've finished I expect our surgeon will be done."

"Certainly — whatever is usual," Doria Quintash answered. It was quite a surprise to the Inspector that there was no trace of a strange accent in her voice. Foreign she looked but English she spoke. "Won't you sit down, Inspector, before you begin?"

"Oh, thank you."

The Inspector looked uneasily about the room for a piece of furniture which would bear his weight. It was a drawing-room as he thought a drawing-room ought to be — at once florid and musty, a place with a suite of ebony and gold furniture upholstered in blue satin, a cabinet of ebony and gold painted with staring posies of flowers, little gimcracky tables, a thick Axminster carpet, and a big marble vase in one of the front windows. It was to the Inspector nice, a room which a self-respecting person had but didn't use. Only there was not much for a self-respecting person of sixteen stone to sit upon. However, the Inspector drew forward a spindle-legged cane chair and lowered himself gingerly onto the edge of it.

"At five minutes past eight a.m.," he read from his notebook, "Martha Green, house-parlormaid to Mr. Anthony Quintash, the famous explorer, rang up the police station and said that on taking, as per usual, a cup of tea into her employer's bedroom, at eight o'clock, she found him dead, and a book which he had been reading and the bedclothes spattered with blood. The bedside lamp was still burning. Martha Green at once proceeded to the hall where a fixed telephone is installed, and called up the district police station. I had just come on duty, and instructing Martha Green to see that the room was not entered or touched, I warned the police surgeon, Mr. Graham Buckland, and in company with him repaired to 15A Ryde Street, Queen's Gate, where the tragedy had occurred. On arriving I found that Martha Green had waked up Mrs. Quintash, who had been sleeping in a room divided from her husband's by a bathroom, and up to that moment was unaware of the catastrophe.

"Anthony Quintash's room was in the front of the house upon the third

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

floor, and his bed stood with its head against the outer wall in the angle of the room. Quintash was lying upon his left side with his face to the wall. A thin, sharp stiletto was driven into his heart, and a book was lying tumbled upon the bedclothes. There was very little blood, and that already dry, both upon the sheets and the page of the book. Upon examination, some writing in pencil was found upon the border of the last page of the book, which had been cut. The writing was without doubt in Quintash's hand, although it was weak and faltering and a trifle blurred. But it was easily decipherable. It ran:

" 'No one is to blame. I fell asleep and tossed over onto my side. My fault. — Tony."

At this point Inspector Grant interrupted his report to ask: "You heard no cry, Mrs. Quintash?"

"None," Doria answered. "I don't think I could have heard if Tony had cried out. There's always a certain amount of noise from cars and lorries on the Knightsbridge road at night."

Grant nodded.

"This street runs up to Knightsbridge, doesn't it? Yes. And there's all the Covent Garden traffic. Besides, I expect Mr. Quintash realized that his injury was fatal and preserved his strength to write those sentences."

He looked again at his report.

"Mr. Quintash, I understand, used that stiletto as a paper-knife regularly, in spite of remonstrances from both you and Martha," he continued.

"Yes, we both thought it dangerous," replied Doria. "I used to put it away the moment Tony went off upon his travels, but it was always lying upon his writing-table the day after he had returned. He had a reason, of course."

Grant looked up. "Oh! Might I hear it?"

"He read a good many foreign scientific books. I don't know whether you're familiar with the look of them, Mr. Grant. They are heavy books with paper covers and thick uncut pages which do want a lot of cutting."

"Yes, I see. I was puzzled about that paper-knife, Mrs. Quintash, and I was afraid that the coroner might be so too ——"

"The coroner?"

Doria Quintash was the puzzled one of the two now. Her forehead set in a frown.

"Do you mean to say that I must have all the publicity of an inquest?" she asked, and there was just a shade of resentment in her voice.

"I don't say that," the Inspector hurried to say. "The coroner may issue a certificate right away, as soon as he gets our surgeon's report. I don't see why he shouldn't. But he has to be informed."

"It depends on the surgeon?"

"A good deal. But I hear him coming, Mrs. Quintash."

The police surgeon was a long, thin, shambling man with a grizzled mustache and an aquiline face. He stared for a few moments at Doria Quintash, at a loss to reconcile this young widow

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who seemed to have stepped straight out from the canvas of an old Italian master with the characterless jumble of tawdry, expensive furniture which cluttered up her drawing-room. If the room had a distinctive feature at all, it was a complete absence of taste, and here she sat at her ease in it.

"Mr. Graham Buckland," said the Inspector, introducing him. The surgeon bowed. He carried a parcel under his arm. He spoke with sympathy.

"I think if we could get hold of your doctor now, Mrs. Quintash, we could between us simplify matters for you."

Doria Quintash shook her head; she glanced at him aslant and a little wistful smile glimmered for a second at the corners of her lips.

"We haven't got a doctor," she answered. She was still saying "We" as if her husband was alive. "I moved into this house while Tony was away in Brazil, not a year ago, and we were both of us never ill."

The answer disturbed Graham Buckland. He edged away on his long, loose legs to the window which was not covered by the marble vase, and stood with his back to the room. It was somehow outrageous and futile that the man who had burst out of the jungle into Bahia with the remnants of his expedition after a two years' successful search for a lost city of the fourteenth century should come so soon to so unnecessary an end in a dull, flat row of houses, with great porticoes much too big for them, in a little side-street of Queen's Gate.

"Then I must put my one question directly to you, Mrs. Quintash."

"Yes?"

"Quintash's death is perfectly explained by the words he wrote in the book," Graham Buckland said bluntly. He had to get his point clear, and though bluntness sounded cruel, it was, like the surgeon's knife, the kinder on that account. "That stiletto might certainly have caused his death just in that way, and probably did. The smallness of the wound, and the slight loss of blood, would have given him the time to scrawl his message, and probably did. But I was at the great reception last night."

Behind him a chair was suddenly pushed back and knocked against a table.

"Oh, not so much of a coincidence, Mrs. Quintash. When I was a younger man I did a good deal of mountain climbing in odd corners of the world, and I've always taken a great interest in the proceedings of the great Society. Last night was not one to be missed. You were there, weren't you? At the end of the third row."

For a quarter of a minute he waited, and then the answer came, quiet and even and controlled.

"Yes. I was there, of course. And I was at the end of the third row."

"Then perhaps you may have noticed what I noticed."

It had been the night of the season. The big lecture theatre had been crowded. Anthony Quintash had broken silence for the first time since

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his return and had told a moving story of his long search; the hopes and fears, the elations and disheartenments which had attended it; the discovery of the earthquake-riven, empty city hidden in the foothills of the Andes; the gradual diminution by fever and snake-bite and attack of his company; the death of his young partner and friend, Julian Devenish, by the upsetting of a canoe. The photography had been marvelous; the diction of the lecture enthralling; the subsequent presentation of the Society's gold medal had been the opportunity for a demonstration of quite unusual enthusiasm.

"But through it all I seemed to hear," Graham Buckland continued, "a quite tragic note of disillusionment. Do you remember when he threw the portrait of Julian Devenish on the screen, that young, eager friend with the fine face marred by the deep scar from the corner of the eye to the jaw — do you remember his words? 'Was it worthwhile? What have we done? Added a footnote to "The Golden Bough," perhaps. Was that worth the loss of so loyal and ardent a spirit as Julian Devenish? I wonder.' On that note of depression he ended, Mrs. Quintash, and my one little doubt is whether Quintash's iron nerve had not at last given way. He was forty-two — young as the world goes now — yes. But he had lived a dozen lives; he carried, as I know now, the scars of a dozen hairbreadth escapes. And I just wonder — you, of course, will know, where I but wonder — whether something had cracked within him, whether" — and here the surgeon's voice hesitated — "whether in a moment of revulsion after his great triumph, he suddenly took his own life last night."

He heard a gasp and turned round. Mrs. Quintash was gazing at him with parted lips and a flush of color in her face. Her great eyes were wide open and curiously bright.

"I never thought of that," she cried, and she added: "I am sure that Tony never did."

The surgeon inclined his head. "It is for you to say."

"I say 'No.' "

Inspector Grant had been turning over the pages of his report a trifle impatiently. He was against speculations in the air. He liked facts on the ground.

"There's one final point, Mrs. Quintash," he said. "You and your husband had supper here when you returned."

"Yes. We dined early before the lecture and I gave orders that something cold should be left for us."

"Martha didn't stay up for you?"

"Oh, no. We didn't get back until after eleven. Martha had gone to bed."

"Quite, quite," said Inspector Grant. "But the dining-room is still as you left it; and though there are two plates used, there are three glasses used."

Mrs. Quintash turned her face to the Inspector, and the enigmatic trifle of a smile shone for the fraction of a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

second in the sideways glance of her eyes and the curl at the corners of her lips.

"A friend of ours took me to the lecture and drove us both back home after it. He came in. He wouldn't stay for supper, but he had a glass of champagne" — the surgeon felt that that was all wrong; it should have been a glass of Chianti — "before he went away."

"And the name of this friend?" continued Inspector Grant, moistening the tip of his pencil with his tongue.

Doria Quintash moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue.

"Mr. Cleveland Hill," she answered. "But he is just a friend of ours. He can tell you nothing more."

"I am sure," replied the Inspector. "But I've got to make a report. If I could see him for a moment, and write down that I've seen him, you get rid of us then altogether, Mrs. Quintash."

The Inspector smiled invitingly and waited.

"He lives in Mount Street," Doria Quintash answered. "I have his telephone number somewhere," and she half-rose from her chair.

But Grant was already on his feet.

"He will be in the book, no doubt. You haven't an extension here? No. We'll go down and get him from the hall. This is a distressing business for you, Mrs. Quintash."

"But we'll spare you all we can," the surgeon added, tucking the parcel under his arm.

The two men went downstairs. The telephone was fixed on the wall of the passage to the front door, with the directory on a sloping shelf beneath it. The Inspector went straight to it. Graham Buckland opened a door upon the right hand. It led into a dining-room at the front of the house. On the threshold he stopped, looking about the room. On the white tablecloth stood the two plates with the remnants of the cold supper upon them. Quintash had sat at the end of the table and carved the ham. There was the gold medal open in its case beside his plate. At the side here Mrs. Quintash had sat — there was the fragment of lace from her gown caught in the joint of her chair — as if, perhaps, she had risen in a hurry. Her plate was pushed forward and the salt-cellar was upset. Graham Buckland drew the plate back to its natural position and suddenly stooped over the tablecloth. He remained in that position and then suddenly stood erect and with his face upturned towards the ceiling. At once he moved back into the passage. He heard the Inspector speaking into the phone.

"It will be better if you heard it all here, sir. Yes, sir, it's serious. . . . No, Mrs. Quintash is quite well. . . . No, she can't come for the moment to the telephone. . . ." and Graham Buckland tapped him on the shoulder. "Just a moment, sir."

He covered the mouthpiece with his hand, and Buckland asked in a low voice:

"You left all the doors of the bedroom locked?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes. I've got the keys."

Grant pulled them out of his pocket and the surgeon glanced at them disparagingly.

"Any sort of door key I should think would open those locks," he said. "However ——"

He shrugged his shoulders, and while Inspector Grant continued to assure Mr. Cleveland Hill that there was nothing the matter with Mrs. Quintash and that the sooner he threw on his clothes and came to Queen's Gate the quicker he would know what was up, he returned into the dining-room and carefully replaced Mrs. Quintash's plate on the spot where he had found it. There was the empty champagne bottle — yes — a glass at the side of each chair — yes, and the third glass at the end of the table where Mr. Cleveland Hill had stood. The surgeon drifted out of the room.

The Inspector was hanging up the receiver at last.

"Fairly frantic, that young man, Mr. Buckland. There's one, I reckon, who won't grieve very deeply over the loss to science of Mr. Anthony Quintash."

"That room behind the dining-room is Quintash's study, I suppose ——" said Buckland.

"Yes, but there's nothing there, Mr. Buckland. I had a look round when you were making your examination upstairs." Nevertheless, Buckland drifted along the passage and went into the study. Very methodically he looked round the room, taking it by portions. Grant followed him.

"Nothing to see here, Mr. Buckland. This is where that stiletto lay, as a rule, according to Martha. On this big table under the window, on the right of the blotting-pad . . ." and suddenly the telephone-bell rang. Grant ran out of the room, crying aloud so that he could be heard at once in the kitchen below and in the drawing-room upstairs. "All right, all right. I'll answer it." And the moment he had gone Graham Buckland very quickly and very silently closed the study door, shutting himself in alone.

Outside in the hall, Inspector Grant listened and replied: "No, sir, this isn't Mrs. Quintash. . . . No, sir, I can't disturb her now. No, no, no, she's really quite well. But it would be very much better if you came here at the quickest. . . . It's impossible to explain over the telephone. . . . Oh, you're dressing. Then we'll expect you in a few minutes. . . . Good! . . . Oh, very well, sir, . . . yes, we are the police."

Inspector Grant was a little exasperated. "That lad doesn't sound too bright to me," he grumbled.

He turned round to share his dissatisfaction with the surgeon and saw him coming out of the study, dusting his fingers.

"Mr. Buckland, you've left that parcel behind in the study."

"No, I put it on the sideboard in the dining-room. I want to have a look at it now."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But he seemed in no hurry, once he was back in the dining-room. He stood with his nose up in the air as if he could smell some secret.

"I wonder what happened in this room last night," he said, slowly and seriously; and Inspector Grant was startled.

But he knew the surgeon for an astute and reasonable man. Graham Buckland did not go off the deep end.

"This young man can tell us if anything happened here," said Grant.

"Can he? I wonder," Buckland answered.

He took his parcel then and opened it.

"Here's the stiletto." It was wrapped in a piece of medical gauze, and he handed it to Grant. "You had better take charge of it — but carefully, for it's as sharp as a razor. It'll have to go to the laboratory, of course, but it's the book which interests me. Have a look at it, Grant."

He had the book wrapped up too, but he sat himself down in a chair by the window, and turned back the gauze. It was a biggish book of quarto size with a paper cover and thick leaves, and it was written in French. While Grant stooped down, Buckland set the book on his knees.

"*Travels in the Sus Country* — that's the title, and — look at the date at the bottom of the title-page — it was published seven years ago."

He turned the title-page and came to the flyleaf.

"And Anthony Quintash bought it seven years ago. There's his name and the date written, and, as you see, half of the pages uncut. Doesn't it seem a little odd to you that he didn't read it when he bought it?"

Inspector Grant pushed out a lower lip and thought the question over.

"No," he said at length. "I think a lot of people buy books which they think they'll read one day and set 'em up on their shelves and never look at 'em again."

Buckland caught him up at once.

"But Quintash did look at this book again, and last night. I'm not sure that that isn't more curious still. You see, when this book was written very little was known about the Sus Country. Long after Lyautey had Morocco well in hand, this strip in the South beyond the Atlas was dangerous and unexplored. But it's better known now. There are more recent, more knowledgeable books about the Sus Country than this. Isn't it odd that Quintash should have taken up to bed to read for the first time a book already out of date?"

But Inspector Grant dug his toes in. He distrusted finely drawn speculations in police work. They led you astray for one thing. Juries made short work of them for another.

"No," he said stubbornly. "Perhaps that book's literature."

The surgeon laughed. "You've got an answer for everything, Grant."

"But you've got a hunch, Mr. Buckland," Grant returned uncomfortably. "And I don't like it. For I've known your hunches to be better than my answers."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Let's hope it isn't so in this case!" said the surgeon. "But here's Mr. Cleveland Hill, I take it, and he may have something to tell us."

A powerful two-seater sports car swung round the corner from Knightsbridge and stopped in front of the door. A young man, tanned on the golf links and trained to the prize-fighter's ounce, burst from it like a bullet and hammered with the knocker until the house shook. Inspector Grant opened the door, and at the sight of his uniform the young man staggered back against the rail.

"Good God, what has happened?" he cried.

"If you want the street to hear, I can tell you now, Mr. Cleveland Hill," said the Inspector. "But I should prefer you to come in."

Mr. Hill pushed into the hall with an apology: "I beg your pardon. I'm a fool."

The Inspector shut the door and ushered the young man into the dining-room. "Our surgeon, Mr. Graham Buckland."

"Surgeon?"

"Yes, Mr. Hill. Will you sit down, please!" The Inspector turned to his notebook. "At eight o'clock this morning, as per usual, Martha Green, house-parlormaid, took a cup of tea into Mr. Quintash's bedroom," and he continued to read until the simple facts of the explorer's death were complete. At the end of the story Cleveland Hill sprang to his feet.

"Where's Doria?" he cried. "I mean, Mrs. Quintash."

"She is upstairs, sir."

"Alone?"

"For the moment."

"I'll go up to her," and he turned towards the door, but Inspector Grant was in the way.

"One moment, sir."

Mr. Cleveland Hill stared at the big officer as if he were the obtusest thing in the world.

"But you can't let her stay up there alone. It's inhuman." He turned to the surgeon. "You've seen Mrs. Quintash? I had a picture upon the wall of my nursery with just her sensitive face and just her hint of a smile."

"An oleograph of the Mona Lisa, I expect," said Mr. Buckland with a nod.

"That's it. Well, you can see. I've known her all my life. She's got to have sympathy. . . ."

"We only want to ask you a question or two," the surgeon interrupted. "For instance, you drank out of that glass last night?"

The young man controlled himself with an effort.

"Yes, I did. I drove Quintash and Doria home and came in with them, and I had a glass of champagne."

"But you didn't stay for supper."

"No." Mr. Cleveland Hill's face fell. He was a very open young man. "They didn't ask me," he explained, and then corrected himself. "At least, Doria did, but Quintash was against it. You know Quintash was a very queer fellow. Running away to Brazil and places like that when you have a wife like Mrs. Quintash, eh? But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

last night he made quite a little speech, kind, you know, and warm-hearted. It was to be the greatest night of his life — that sort of thing. He had been presented with his Society's gold medal and he wanted to complete the evening with a private little presentation to his wife."

"What!"

And suddenly the surgeon was on his feet with the strangest expression upon his face.

"Yes. Queer, wasn't it? Doria couldn't make head or tail of it. I don't think she half liked it, you know. It wasn't after all very civil to me, was it? He only had to say good evening and I should have gone away without any of that play-acting."

"I see. You think he was just staging an excuse to get rid of you."

"Well, it looked a bit like it, didn't it?" said Mr. Cleveland Hill. "Is that all?"

"As far as I am concerned," said Buckland.

"The same here," the Inspector added pleasantly. "We had to make sure with an accident of this kind that everything was normal, of course."

He held open the door and Mr. Cleveland Hill was halfway up the stairs in a flash. The police-surgeon shot a queer glance at the Inspector. "So you think that everything's quite normal. We'll just wait a second until the gentleman upstairs is deep in his oleographic Italy — floating between high black houses on a canal of Venice, or gazing at the moon in a dark garden of Florence. Mona Lisa! She *is* uncommonly like the Gioconda, but I don't think the Gioconda could have put up with the drawing-room furniture."

All the while he was talking, Graham Buckland was wrapping up the travel book in its gauze.

"I am going to borrow this from you for a day. You can trust it to me."

He went to the door and listened. "It's all right, I think. Let me have the key of the bedroom door again. Right! Swiss guides used to have an idea that if you made a noise on a dangerous snow slope, you might bring an avalanche down. Just see what a good climber I was."

The surgeon slipped up the stairs like a shadow. He heard a murmur of voices in the drawing-room and went up to the next floor. He was more careful than ever, and the voices were still murmuring in the drawing-room when he got down again to the ground floor.

"All right," he said, and he handed the key of Anthony Quintash's bedroom back to Inspector Grant. "You can leave all the doors open now. Quintash, of course — the usual proper dignities. He needn't be moved from his room. I shall see the coroner this morning, but I'll tell you something." He drew the Inspector into the dining-room and closed the door. "The coroner will not give a certificate. You can take that from me."

The Inspector was disappointed.

"There will have to be a public inquest?" he asked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"There will, and it won't end with the inquest," Buckland said grimly. He picked up the book which Anthony Quintash had been reading and tucked it under his arm. "Can I find you late tonight if I want you? At your house, eh? I've got the address. You're unhappy? Yes. You hoped it was just an accident? Normal was your word. Well, you may be right. But I think we are up against as grim and strange a crime as you and I have ever known"; and with that the surgeon let himself out into the respectable area of Queen's Gate.

At half-past eleven that night Inspector Grant was smoking a final pipe in the parlor of his little house in the Brixton Road. He was uneasy, for he had never seen Graham Buckland, in all the years of their common experience, thrown so markedly out of his stride. The Inspector looked at the clock upon his mantelshelf. "He won't come now," he said at one moment. "He'd have sent me a message if he wasn't coming," at the next, and as the hands pointed to a quarter to twelve, a stick was stretched out from the steps at the front door and tapped upon the bow-window. Grant opened the door to a very tired and exhausted surgeon of police.

"Give me a drink first," said Graham Buckland, and he toppled into an armchair. "It's a case for a warrant on a charge of murder."

Grant mixed a stiff whisky-and-soda for his guest and watched him drink it. Then he sat down opposite him and said quietly: "Let me hear."

"I was puzzled over that book from the beginning," Buckland explained. "Partly for the reasons I gave you, partly too because that bloodstained page looked to me a little used. I put that together with the disheartened tone Quintash had employed last night in his lecture, and I was honestly inclined to suspect that he had deliberately committed suicide and had written that message to deceive everybody into the belief that he had died by accident. Personally, I should have been prepared to help him out, but I had to be sure about it. A small bunch of keys was lying with his watch on the table by his bed, and I took that bunch away with me, thinking that some paper or another in a locked drawer might point to the real truth. There was one rather elaborate small key of Italian workmanship which particularly caught my eye. With that bunch in my pocket I came down to the drawing-room, and I had no sooner put my suspicion of suicide into words than it was badly shaken. Do you remember what Mrs. Quintash did? She gave a gasp and said: 'Oh, I never thought of that.' Well, that might just mean, 'I never dreamed he would do a thing like that.' But it might also mean, and I had an unpleasant hunch that it did mean, 'That would have been a better explanation, if I had thought of it.'

"Mere guess-work? Yes, but wait. We went downstairs and while you were telephoning to young Cleveland Hill, I went into the dining-room. Did you notice that the plate in front

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of Mrs. Quintash's chair had been pushed forward and the salt-cellar upset? You did, and thought no more about it than I did. But I moved the plate back to its original place, and I saw that it covered four little sets of marks in the tablecloth — not exactly rents, but threads in the linen had been torn, the nap fluffed up a little, and the cloth pricked. And these four sets were the corners of a small square and they were quite fresh. It seemed to me that at some time during supper a small square box mounted on metal claws had been placed on the table in front of Mrs. Quintash and that she had sprung up and pushed her plate violently away from her, upsetting the salt-cellar and whatever it was which had been placed in front of her.

"I looked round the room and could see nothing which offered any explanation. So I went along the passage to the study."

"And I followed you," said Inspector Grant.

"But you were called to the telephone by that ebullient young gentleman, Mr. Cleveland Hill," Graham Buckland continued. "By that time I had spotted something which might account for the marks — a square steel box of old make mounted on claw feet, standing on the top of a high bookshelf. I jumped onto a chair and took it down. The small Italian key upon Quintash's bunch slipped exactly into the lock. I opened the box. It was about the height of a spirit case and, like a spirit case, the front fell down with the raising of the lid. I was looking at a human face about the size of a small melon, a face with every feature intact and there was hair upon the scalp. The only real disfigurement was that the lips were bloated and there were holes in them as though they had been skewered together.

"After the first jar, I remembered Quintash had been in Brazil. To reduce the head of the enemy you have killed to the size of an orange without spoiling the features is a secret of the Indians on the Amazon. You put it up on the mantel-piece, as it were, as a memento, and if you feel down and out, why, you have something to cheer you up again. A good many people have brought one of these heads home as a curiosity. But something puzzled me about this one. It didn't look native," and Inspector Grant sat back in his chair with a gasp. He looked round his sitting-room, comforting himself with the knowledge that he was in the Brixton Road with taxis and late omnibuses roaring past his door.

"The face was dark, of course, dark as an Indian's, but then it had been kippered. It had been hung up by the lips and smoked, but it didn't look native. No! I took it up in my hands and I got the shock of my life. Upon my soul, I almost dropped it. I feel myself tingling now. For a great scar ran down from the corner of the eye to the jaw. I was looking at the head of Quintash's young friend, Julian Devenish! The loyal and devoted

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

partner to whom Quintash had paid so pathetic a tribute in his lecture. You see, I had to revise my opinion of Quintash. What was he? A hypocrite? A man who hated Devenish and when he was dead treated him with the same horrible indignity which an Indian would use towards his enemy?

"I replaced the head in the box and the box again on the bookshelf. I went back to the dining-room with my brain in a whirl, and five minutes afterwards young Cleveland Hill gave the whole show away. Quintash wouldn't let him stay for supper — not he. He meant to complete his day. He had been presented with a gold medal and he meant to make a presentation to his wife. What he presented her with was Julian Devenish's head, exact in every feature but the lips — eyes, skull, nose, scar, everything, but reduced to the size of a small melon which you could hold in your hand. The end of a perfect day, what?"

"But that's devilish!" Grant exclaimed, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief. "Even if there were provocation."

"Was there provocation?" Buckland resumed. "Was Julian Devenish Doria Quintash's lover? Was this Quintash's revenge? And if so — that was the question I was stubbing my toes against — what was Doria Quintash's reaction last night? Do you see, Grant? I fell back upon my first idea — modified. The book held the secret and I had to tear it out of it."

"What did you do?" Grant asked, leaning forward eagerly in his chair, and Graham Buckland resumed his narrative.

"I looked up an old copy of *Who's Who* and I found that at the time this French book was published, Quintash was living near Farnham. I drove down to Farnham and found the house, smothered in roses and surrounded by a garden — a haunt of peace on a country road. Then after a few inquiries I found the doctor who had attended them. He was a tall, lean man, who seemed to think that the world was a ridiculous joke and went off into great fits of laughter over catastrophes and disasters, a Dr. Sturgis.

" 'And what do you want to see me about, Mr. Buckland?' he asked.

" 'About this,' I answered, and I held the book out to him.

" 'Where in the world did you get that?' he continued, in surprise. 'I saw in the evening paper that Quintash had died.'

" 'So you know the book?' said I.

" 'Know it? I should think I do. I attended Quintash after his accident.'

" 'Accident?' I cried.

" 'Yes. He took that book to bed with him and a sharp knife to cut the leaves, and he fell asleep and rolled over on his side and wounded himself.'

" 'And when was that?'

"Dr. Sturgis searched in a little safe and fetched out a case-book.

" 'That's the time. Seven years ago.' To Dr. Sturgis it was the funniest episode. 'He thought he was going to die — he wasn't near dying really —

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and he wrote that message on the margin. "It's all my fault, etc." '

" 'To save his wife any difficulties if he did die, I suppose,' I said, and Sturgis roared with amusement.

" 'I'm sorry, but you'll have to do that bit over again, Mr. Buckland. It won't do,' said Sturgis. And then out came the truth. Quintash and his wife hated one another like cat and dog. There was a young fellow, called Julian Devenish, who had just made a little name for himself by a journey in Arabia. He was always about the place, adored her. I made a remark about her striking appearance and I was afraid Dr. Sturgis was going to roll out of his chair onto the floor, so diverting he found it.

" 'Oh, yes, the Mona Lisa stunt. She had the sideways glance all right — if a young man was around — but that's all. She was a common little trollop.' And Sturgis added, and, my dear Grant, I beg you to notice the addition, 'The only Italian in that *ménage* was Anthony Quintash. He was small, supple, vindictive, patient, and proud. Remember him! Dress him up in a doublet and hose. He came straight out of the Cinquecento, didn't he? He wrote those lines on the margin of his book, because if he died he wasn't going to have his neighbors think that he'd killed himself out of jealousy or unhappiness. Believe me, I know what I'm talking about. Anthony Quintash was waiting his turn. He could even find enjoyment in waiting. Sooner or later, in his own good time, at the artistically perfect moment, he meant to tread a measure with his Mona Lisa.'

"Thus spoke Dr. Sturgis, and last night Quintash trod his measure with his Mona Lisa. He had been received with acclamation, he had been presented with his gold medal. She, indifferent to him and confident in her own attractions, was stringing along a new lover. Imagine the moment if you can when Anthony Quintash placed in front of her, no doubt with a thousand ceremonious and courtly words, the head of her old lover, reduced to the compass of an eight-day clock. No wonder she pushed her plate away and upset the salt. How shall we explain her? Panic? Horror? Fear? Hatred? Wouldn't that be the order? But she remembers that accident seven years ago, and when Quintash is asleep, she stages it more effectively in the dead of the night."

Graham Buckland rose to his feet. "I am going home. The rest is for you."

Inspector Grant knocked his pipe out against the firebars. "Yes," he said heavily. "Yes, I'll take action."

Inspector Grant came out onto the steps of his house with the surgeon, and hailed a passing taxi.

"Good night, Mr. Buckland." He looked up and down the street with its vista of little villas lit by the rows of street-lamps linked as far as the eye could see.

"I've at times, Mr. Buckland," he said, "felt an urge to see the world, but upon my word, there's something to be said for the Brixton Road."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In a letter to your Editor, Walter Duranty once wrote: "I know a lot of magazine editors and most of them somehow want to tell the reader beforehand what the story is about. This seems a most difficult job, because . . . if you say too much, it gives the story away."

Well, we are not going to risk Mr. Duranty's wrath. All we are going to say is that "Double Trouble" will carry you along relentlessly by its sheer storytelling pull, and that . . . But we must be firm!

DOUBLE TROUBLE

by HUGH O'CONNOR and WALTER DURANTY

MAGDA was impressed by him at first sight. So was the concierge who brought his flowers and his card from the stage door. "He has the grand manner," the concierge had said. "And he is generous. He may be your future."

She liked his taste in wines and the quiet readiness with which he paid for the best the night they met. M. Termann became Gustave, and Mme. Covaky became Magda. Her curiosity grew with her affection, but after a week she knew no more about him than after the first night.

He did not seem to have any business — certainly none that was pressing — yet he told her he must remain three days longer in Paris before he could follow her to Switzerland, where her next engagement was to dance at the Casino in Bern.

Magda said she suspected there was another woman. She stormed. She cajoled. She said he would come with her immediately if he really cared as much as she did. It was an ardent performance. And in a burst of the generosity which sometimes surprises a man when he is stirred by a woman, he satisfied her curiosity.

"Have you ever heard of John Harley?" he asked.

"The great John Harley?" she said. "Isn't he the richest Englishman on the Continent?"

"Yes," said he, "and he hates to sit at great state banquets and public ceremonies listening to dull speeches, when he might be elsewhere doing something more pleasant."

She cried out in delight, "And so you are John Harley!"

"Only sometimes," he said regretfully.

She was bewildered. "How can you be only sometimes John Harley?"

"Only when he wants me to be," he replied. "I am really an actor — or I was until he saw me in a show and noticed that I resembled him amazingly. Now I am John Harley's double. For two years I have taken his place on public occasions."

Copyright, 1936, by The Crowell Publishing Company

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Magda was thrilled. "That's better than a story book," she cried.

"It's a great secret," he said. "He wouldn't take me to America with him because the American newspapers watch people so closely. He has had to make all his own public appearances there, and he is probably sick of it. That's why I must be in Paris when he comes back on Tuesday. I may have to receive the Legion of Honor or a delegation of grateful Rumanian bankers, or something of the sort, before I can get away to Bern."

"Oh," she said, "I should love to see you as John Harley."

"Sometime or other," he said, "I will try to arrange it."

When he put Magda on the train for Bern, he said he still hoped to arrive on Wednesday morning, but would telephone if anything interfered.

Meanwhile John Harley was in mid-ocean. Wireless reports from Paris warned him of heavy selling of Harley securities. He bought but could not stop the movement. Apparently some group aware of his true situation was selling him short — selling securities they did not have at present but would be able to supply profitably after they had smashed him.

He suspected his own associates. They were the most likely to have discovered what he was doing. They had asked him to return to Paris for an urgent conference. And while waiting they were probably trying to recover as much as possible from the market.

For years he had proceeded on the principle that his credit need no longer have any relation to his assets, because they were believed to be there. His assets were now the gold reserve, which everyone believed adequate, although no one had ever counted it — or even seen it. Currencies had gone on for years with the gold reserve removed.

For years, therefore, Harley had lied and made false statements at will. He had multiplied his assets from corporation to corporation, from nation to nation. His credit had become what he chose to make it. He felt sure that he was on his way to the financial domination of Europe — until the depression lasted too long.

Now it would be only a short while before some prison enclosed him for the rest of his life — desperately he searched for another way out. The more he struggled, the greater the sense of frustration became. It moved in on him like prison walls. He knew the associates who had given him absolute power had already begun to hunt him down on the security exchanges of the world.

That was the way he crossed the ocean. When he reached Paris on Tuesday afternoon he was so tired in mind and body that he wanted nothing more to do with the problem. He felt suffocated by it and his eyes ached. But he could not get away from it. He stopped on the way from the boat train and bought a pistol. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lt relieved even as he handled it in ıe gunsmith's shop.

He drove to his Paris headquarters — a mansion in the Faubourg St. Germain which once belonged to Prince ugène de Beauharnais, stepson of he great Napoleon.

The front of the house on the Rue e Lille was occupied by Harley's esident secretaries and servants. A entral court of honor, which had ɔeen turned into a garden, separated hem from the rear of the establishnent, where Harley had fitted out his ɔrivate apartment. He was further ɔolated by soundproofing. Neither ervants nor associates ever entered ıere except when summoned.

Before shutting himself up in this ɔrivate apartment, Harley gave only ɔne order — he did not want to be listurbed by anyone until his assoiates arrived late that evening. Alone ıe paced the floor; he sat down; he ose; he tried to sleep. He started all ɔver again. He was no longer even atempting to think, but thoughts coninued to move through his head like nert fragments. There was no purɔose to it.

He poured himself a brandy highɔall in which he used champagne inːtead of soda. At that moment his ɔanking associates were making a forːune selling Harley securities which hey did not have while preparing to uin him for listing assets that he did ıot have. Everything seemed to have ɔecome unreasonable.

As he drank steadily, his suicide ook on a heroic aspect. He began to feel he was not just a man driven frantically to suicide. He was one who had set up a new credit system which the world was too stupid to accept; and he was now about to step out deliberately and let the entire system fall in on them, as a judgment on their stupidity. This was a historic occasion.

His nerves steadied as he put the loaded pistol under the pillow of his bed and turned to arrangements for making his exit with the greatest shock to the world. He would give them no warning and leave no instructions what to do.

To his father and sister, for whom he had provided handsomely in England and whom he seldom saw, he wrote a jointly addressed note: "You know my affection for you. Goodbye. Please have my body cremated."

To his chief secretary he addressed an envelope and enclosed his card inscribed "Goodbye and thank you," together with a sheaf of American banknotes making ten thousand dollars.

He always carried a large sum of assorted currencies from which he dispensed rewards to executives and agents who had produced some notably good result or provided first news of some important development. He considered a bonus to have the greatest effect when it was immediate and in cash. He likewise applied the principle to bribes. Now he piled up the unused balance of the fund on his desk without even counting it. He no longer had any need for it. The pistol

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

under his pillow was of more use.

His only other envelope was addressed to his chief executive, reading simply: "As I have made such a mess of things, I think this is the best solution for everybody concerned."

The telephone before him began muttering. It was equipped that way to avoid unseemly noises. He took up the receiver impatiently to find out who dared to intrude on this most private wire.

"This is Gustave Termann, sir," said the voice. "I saw in the afternoon papers that you had returned. Do you expect to make use of me?"

"No," said Harley. "There seems to be no occasion . . . for some time . . . I shall be leaving here almost immediately."

"Perhaps you would have occasion to make use of me where you are going, sir," said Termann.

"That would be difficult," said Harley. The idea gave him some ironic amusement. He said suddenly, "On second thought, perhaps I can use you. How long will it take you to get here?"

"About one minute, sir," said Termann. "I'm telephoning from the next street."

"Come immediately," said Harley, "and I shall decide meanwhile what to do. The private entrance on the Quai d'Orsay as usual, and ring three times."

He had little time to decide anything before a bell on his desk uttered the triple ring like an old clock chiming. He opened the private door into a remodeled back staircase once used by servants, and let in Termann.

Harley silenced him with a gesture, poured an inch of brandy for him and filled it up with champagne. "Drink that," he ordered, "while I make up my mind."

"This is a great honor, sir," said Termann, regarding the drink with a mixture of surprise and deference.

Like a general surveying a battlefield he had chosen, Harley marched about the apartment.

"This time," he said, "it is much more important than passing yourself off as Harley at a public ceremony. I propose that you should stay here to receive a group of my associates, to hold them off. I shall need as much time as possible. Have you any relatives or close friends who will miss you in the meanwhile?"

"None, sir," said Termann earnestly. "I have relatives, but I never see them. Because of a woman, I had to leave home, change my name, and —"

Harley cut him short.

"Very well," he said. "You are to act a nervous breakdown requiring an indefinite rest. When my associates arrive, act confused, enraged, say that you must have sleep. Shout to them to get out and leave you to your doctors. Tell them you can no longer remember things you were carrying in your head. That ought to paralyze them. My secretary will be with them and he can be depended upon to take charge of the situation and get rid of them. You are to stay in bed here until I return."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Then it may take days," said Termann inquiringly.

"Unless," said Harley ironically, "you have some more important engagement."

"No, sir, of course not, sir," said Termann hurriedly. "It is only that I did not expect it. I bought a ticket to Bern tonight and my bag is already packed in my hotel room. I only wanted to see some of the Swiss Oberland."

Harley looked at him in astonishment.

"Nothing," he said, "could be more convenient. Bern is on my route to Milan. I will take your bag and use your ticket. Meanwhile the Swiss Oberland will have to wait for you."

"Of course, sir," said Termann humbly. "Excuse me for mentioning it." He turned over his hotel key to Harley with detailed directions for finding the room.

"Now put on my pajamas and get into bed for a quick rehearsal before I go," said Harley. "You had better be in bed facing the wall as if you were asleep. I shall play the secretary who will bring my associates here this evening. I will try to wake you. Pretend a while not to respond to call or touch. Then begin the rage and temperamental display."

"How shall I know their names?" Termann asked as he put on the pajamas of thick lilac silk.

"I shall tell you how to recognize those you should know, as usual, while we are going through it," said Harley. "You seem to have a good memory for names."

"I have never forgotten any of my own," said Termann as he got into bed.

"What was your real name, by the way?" said Harley.

"Georgi Braun, and now Gustave Termann, at your service," said Termann, obediently rolling over to face the wall with his head buried in the pillow.

Harley slipped his hand under the pillow and took out the pistol. Holding it an inch from Termann's right ear, he shot him through the head.

Termann died without a sound, in a single long shudder.

Harley took a handkerchief from his pocket, wrapped a corner of it around the muzzle of the pistol, and held it that way while he wiped his fingerprints from the trigger and the butt. Still holding it by the wrapped muzzle, he closed Termann's fingers over the trigger and the butt while they were limp and warm. Then he put on Termann's clothes.

In Termann's pockets he found a German passport made out to Gustave Termann, bearing a photograph which might well have been Harley's. The Swiss visa was in proper order. He put on Termann's wrist watch and a pair of rimmed spectacles — and looked around in a final check-up of the thing he had planned to do. Then, taking forty-five thousand dollars with him, he walked boldly out, went on to Termann's hotel, gave up the room, and took Termann's bag in a taxicab to the Gare de l'Est. On the way he opened it and found it held

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

another suit, neckties, socks, linen, bathrobe, slippers, toilet articles.

As the train pulled out of Paris, Harley ordered an excellent dinner and a good bottle. He was not surprised to find no news of his death in the final editions of newspapers which the train picked up on the way. He expected his associates to have the sense to hold up their announcement until after the closing of the American markets, five hours later in time than Paris, so that the news would break when all were closed. They would find there was nothing to be done, however; and the crash which would follow the discovery of the body, and Harley's letters, could not fail to make his suicide completely reasonable.

Harley went tranquilly to sleep, expecting to read all about it in the morning newspapers in Switzerland. He was completely confident that his double would fill his role in Harley's last public appearance with even less risk of questioning than in any appearance before.

As the train approached Bern, the dining-car steward brought the Swiss morning newspapers, and John Harley read, as he anticipated, that he had been found dead in his Paris apartment late the previous evening.

All the stories were clear about the tragedy. Harley's associates and his secretary had entered his apartment by appointment only to find him dead in bed in his pajamas, with his hand still clutching a pistol. He had blown out his brains with a single shot, leaving a few brief notes conveying little but his decision to kill himself.

There was no mystery discernible in the situation — either in the conduct of the financial insiders or in the comment with which they attempted to calm the investing public. His suicide had passed as authentic.

At the Bern station Harley got out in leisurely fashion and watched the porter getting his bag through the window.

He felt a pair of arms flung around his neck in a whirl of excitement and perfume. A gay voice cried in his ear: "Ah, Gustave, darling, there you are! I was afraid you weren't coming. I didn't get the telephone message you promised, but I came to the train anyway. I even have an automobile that I borrowed from our stage manager at the Casino."

"Fine," he managed to say, as he got clear of the slim young figure and confronted the emergency. "What do we do now?"

"Anything you like," she said.

"I think I'd like a drink," he said, trying to gain time.

She led the way to the station café. He looked at her inquiringly as he told the waiter to hustle for his brandy and soda.

"I don't need anything," she said exuberantly.

Harley liked her oval face, clear skin, and warm gipsy coloring. She was simply dressed and had moved as gracefully as a cat — or a dancer. She took him for Termann. Good!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Talk to me," he said. "I am still tired from the train."

"Well," she said, "I've arranged just the thing for a tired man. The hotel manager at the Bellevue is very nice. He told me about a beautiful spot a half-hour from here. It's high over the Aare and only twenty yards off the road. We can drive all the way. There's a ledge where we can have lunch, screened from the road, and have the world spread out at our feet."

"I think I should like to have the world spread out at my feet," he said. "That sounds like something I wanted once."

"Come," she said, leaning forward happily. "I've ordered a hamper of lunch to be ready when we leave your bag at the hotel. We can go right off and sit in the sunshine and you can take a nap after eating. I'll watch over you. I told the hotel to put in a bottle of the Hallgartner 1917 that you drank the night we met."

"I still like it," he said, and noted that his double's taste in Rhine wines was like his own.

"And do you still like me?" she asked.

"What other reason could you imagine for my being here?" he replied gently.

"I'm glad," she said. "It was so sad to meet you only as I was leaving Paris. But we can go on here, until I leave for Nice."

"Let's make the most of it," he said.

It was evident he would have to invent an excuse to slip away as soon as possible, but he did not want to do it in a way that would leave her as a dangerous question mark.

It was only a few blocks to the Bellevue Hotel. The hotel manager greeted them effusively. The charming young person from the Casino had evidently made a friend of him. M. Termann was escorted to a room while she waited.

Upstairs, Harley contemplated the situation. It was evident her acquaintanceship with Termann, although affectionate, was only recent. It would be easy to leave her.

They crossed the blue clear Aare where it wound through Bern, and they drove through the villas of Kirchenfeld. The road followed the Aare, slanting steadily up the steep walls of the valley, and arrived finally on a shelf of rock high in the air, jutting out enough through the trees to give them a view up and down the valley.

"Isn't this a cure for fatigue?" she asked.

He said it was. He liked the view up the valley toward the great peaks. To him they seemed immutable and calm.

"I'm afraid of peaks like that," she said.

She preferred the view down the valley. It opened out in pasture areas, crossed by strips of forest that looked like harvest processions threading a zigzag way. He said it was as precise as an etching — and as neat.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They agreed at any rate that the Alps were conveniently arranged to enable any spectator to see what he chose to see. Also that they stimulated the appetite.

They lunched. He praised the Hallgartner and talked of other wines. She said her father was a wine merchant in Budapest. She told him of her childhood as if she had never told it to Termann before, and of her ambition to be a famous dancer.

He grew confident and more interested in her.

"Tell me everything that has happened to you since we were last together," he said.

She talked of the show at the Casino . . . of the way her dancing was received.

"I have a new gipsy dance that you haven't seen," she said.

She got up and showed him, and ended in a whirl that dropped her close beside him with her head against his shoulder. Her eyes were shining. He put his arm around her. She patted his hand.

"You know," she said after a pause, "you've never told me much about yourself."

"I never like to talk about myself," said Harley, automatically using the answer with which he had so often put off questioners. "Let me tell you about the funny Englishwoman with a cockeye who glared at me — or at the man next me — on the train from Paris."

He was describing the Englishwoman, her distracted look, her evident suspicion of everyone who did not speak English, when Magda dropped his hand and looked up suddenly. She stared at him from the front, then from each side. She said nothing but she looked frightened.

"What's the trouble, my dear?" he said reassuringly.

"I don't know what to think," she said, "or even if I ought to speak of it at all."

She took a deep breath.

"I've just made up my mind that you aren't Gustave Termann at all, but John Harley," she told him.

He heard every word. He could not believe she had said it. But there it was. He tried to smile ironically as he asked at last, "Why?"

"You couldn't know," she said, "and I don't think even Gustave realizes how completely I fell in love with him in a week. You are very like him — so much that you might fool anyone but a woman in love.

"You fooled me, too, until I came close to you. But when I put my head on your shoulder, you were different. A woman can't miss it if she is in love. Your hands have a different kind of warmth. And Gustave has a little lump on his wrist, too small for anyone else to notice. I asked him about it and he told me it was a thorn that stuck in him years ago. I couldn't find the lump on your wrist when I rubbed my hand on it."

"But why does all this make you think I am Harley?" he asked.

"Because," she said, "Gustave told

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me he was working as your double. I knew it was a great secret. That was why I didn't think I could mention it even to you. But I couldn't go on making believe you were the man I was in love with, as soon as I knew you weren't. I think I ought to know what is expected of me. Gustave told me nothing except that you were about to return. He said he would telephone me."

"He had no opportunity," said Harley. "I put him in my place suddenly in Paris.

"He didn't tell me about you," he continued coldly. "And I certainly didn't think he had told anyone of his doubling. I pay him ten thousand dollars a year to keep it to himself."

"Oh," she said anxiously, "he said he never told anyone else. He trusted me only because he likes me so much. He said it was the greatest confidence he had to give. He made me swear by my dead mother to keep it."

She bowed her head and crossed herself devoutly in her mother's memory. As she raised her head she shrank from the look in Harley's eyes.

"Please," she said. "He wasn't disloyal. He was so proud to be so much like you. I have been so discreet that I didn't want to talk about it even to you at first. I hope I haven't cost him his job."

"No," said Harley grimly. "He can continue if you will help out by making me appear as Termann for a while."

"Oh," she said in relief, "that would be wonderful. It's better than anything on the stage. Tell me what part I am to play."

"What do you know about my movements?" Harley asked. "Have you read the morning newspaper?"

"No," she said, "I was in too much of a hurry to meet the train. All I know is that Gustave told me you were due in Paris yesterday. I thought you were there right now. But I know now it is Gustave you left in your place."

Harley was walking up and down. She watched him anxiously. "The difficulty," he said, "is to be sure you will remain silent if I tell you more."

She glowed. "Of course, you can trust me always," she said.

"Perhaps," he said, looking at the sky, "we had better go back to the hotel to talk it over. I heard a rumble of thunder and I think I see a storm coming around the corner of the valley."

As he studied the corner of the valley, she stepped alongside to see. He put his arm around her to steady her, and swept her over the edge.

It was a sheer drop of several hundred feet onto a jagged rock slide. Her shriek swiftly diminished as she fell. He saw her body land and lie motionless.

He turned abruptly and picked up her pocketbook, and went back to the car. He examined her passport. It gave him her name for the first time. It was Magda Covaky, Hungarian, born in Budapest; occupation, dancer; age, 22.

He drove back to the hotel to give

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the alarm. The hotel manager said he would guide the police to the spot, to spare Mr. Termann's shattered nerves after such a tragedy.

Harley explained to the police that they had lunched and that he had walked to the edge of the cliff to look at the weather. She had called to him not to go any closer because it made her dizzy. He laughed at her. He was filled with remorse for that laughter. For she had suddenly run down to pull him back and had slipped at the edge. In his attempt to clutch her as she toppled screaming over the edge, he had almost fallen himself. It was nerve-racking even to recall it.

The hotel manager was remorseful also. It was he who had recommended the fatal spot. The police were sympathetic amid the general distress. The girl's dressing-room companions at the Casino said the dead dancer had talked over the impending happy week with the man who was coming from Paris. The stage manager, who had loaned her the car, had also heard some of the story from her.

Under the circumstances the inquest was a formality.

Harley said he knew little of her past, as might be expected in an affair of such short duration. He asked the police to get in touch with her family and to offer to send the body home. He gave the police a thousand Swiss francs to defray the expenses and to "make such use of as you see fit."

"Monsieur is generous," said the chief, pocketing the money. "Your passport will be returned and clearance in this unfortunate accident will be ready for you in three days. It takes that long to put our report through the necessary routine."

They bowed at each other and parted.

Harley felt he had played his part well, but he felt no satisfaction in it.

During the three-day wait Harley attempted to rearrange his life as Termann. He found it a small, mean world for a man accustomed to dominating a billion-dollar financial empire. He who had started life with four thousand dollars found it difficult to restart with forty-five thousand dollars. As he contemplated what he might do, he found all his plans were too large.

He began to see that he would have as much difficulty recognizing a small opportunity as another man would have in recognizing a large one. He was only Termann now, but with Harley's imagination. He even had to give up Harley's habit of mixing brandy highballs with champagne. As Termann, he used soda with his brandy.

He wandered restlessly about the city. Everywhere he confronted the great stir of the Alps. He reflected that it was the only great thing left to him. By this time his suicide by proxy had receded into accomplished fact. His body had been sent back to England and cremated after a quiet funeral.

He noted in the newspapers that the offices he maintained in various

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

financial centers had been ransacked for the non-existent diary which his suicide postscript said he had mislaid.

He read increasingly vituperative accounts of his methods and of his private life. It was reported that he was really a vicious fellow who spent the night before his suicide drinking brandy and champagne — and whose dead body reeked of alcohol. Even his associates excused themselves now by saying they had no idea they were dealing with a madman.

It was an agony to Harley to watch them dismantle the system on which he had spent his life. When his associates observed piously that the Harley scandal showed the danger of entrusting one man with such immense financial resources, he almost wished he had chosen prison instead of suicide, so that he could make plain to the world what hand they had in it. A dead man cannot explain.

All he could do now was sit impotently in front of a drink and a newspaper at a café table and recognize that he had imprisoned himself in another man's identity.

Even Termann's photograph confronted Harley as his own on the inside pages of the local newspapers when they reported the accidental death of the Casino dancer. The Casino management had supplied her photograph, aware of the publicity value of romance coupled with tragedy; and the Bernese newspapers had reproduced the photograph of her friend, M. Gustave Termann of the Bellevue Hotel, from his passport temporarily in the hands of the police. The two photographs were printed side by side. Like many other men who would have preferred obscurity for events in which they took no pride, Harley cursed the newspapers.

He was relieved at last by a telephone call from the chief of police notifying him that all the papers covering the girl's death had been completed and the case closed. He could call for his passport at his convenience. He lost no time. At police headquarters he was politely received by the chief himself, who returned the passport. At the hotel he packed his bag and descended to pay his bill.

As the porter set down Harley's bag to await the settlement, a stranger in the lobby looked at Harley sharply and went outside. At the head of the taxicab line he approached a chauffeur who was dozing in the afternoon sunshine.

"I want to play a joke on a friend who is about to drive to the railroad station," the stranger said to the chauffeur. "Let me take your cab and surprise him when he gets out."

"But, monsieur," said the chauffeur, "I cannot give up my cab. Who knows if I will ever get it back?"

"Nonsense," said the stranger. "That car in the parking space is mine. It's worth ten of your taxicabs. Come." He led the grumbling chauffeur to a big touring car and thrust a key into the lock. "Get in," he ordered, "and observe that you are in command. Keep it until I return your taxicab. I must have my little joke."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The peremptory order, accompanied by a smile and fifty Swiss francs, completed the transaction. The stranger tossed his hat into the car and took the chauffeur's, which he jammed down over his eyes. He was installed in the taxicab seat just as Harley came out and the doorman whistled up the cab at the head of the waiting line.

"To the railroad station," said Harley, without noticing the man in the chauffeur's seat.

Halfway to the station the stranger turned the taxicab down a side alley and stopped. Harley looked up as he came around to the side door and leaned into the cab. He thrust a folded newspaper into Harley's hand. "Is that your picture?" he asked.

"Yes," said Harley, astonished by his fierce tone.

"You are Gustave Termann?" he said.

"Yes," said Harley. "Who are you to question me?"

"Once you were Georgi Braun," he went on. Harley stared at him in startled silence.

"I knew it," he shouted. He drew his hand from his pocket in a flash and hit Harley over the head with a wrench. Harley sank unconscious to the floor of the cab.

The stranger closed the taxicab door and drove beyond the outskirts of Bern until he came to a wooded stretch, where he stopped after looking about. He took a towing rope out of the tool box and with the unconscious Harley over his shoulder, like a soldier carrying a wounded comrade, he went about a hundred yards into the woods. There he bound Harley securely, gagged him, and left him.

Within an hour of absence the stranger was back at the Bellevue Hotel. He wakened the taxicab chauffeur, who had resumed his doze in the car. "Get up, sleepy-head," he said, "my joke was successful and now I am going home." He gave the taxicab chauffeur another five francs to refresh himself and drove away with the chauffeur's blessing.

Back at the wooded stretch the stranger stopped to pick up Harley, who was still unconscious. He felt his pulse anxiously. He laid the body on the floor in front of the rear seat of the automobile and covered it with lap rugs.

Through the growing dusk and all night he drove across Switzerland with the bound and gagged Harley as an unconscious passenger. Now and then he verified Harley's pulse. He also brought a flask of brandy.

Shortly before dawn, in the period of tremulous uncertainty when physical courage seems to ooze away from men and only moral fortitude prevails, the automobile slid through a last sleeping village, past its small graveyard at the outskirts, and turned into a lane. The purring motor died, the surrounding silence hung undisturbed.

He laid the inert body on the grass, then he removed the gag and poured

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

some brandy into Harley's mouth. Harley shuddered and opened his eyes.

"I was afraid I killed you when I hit you," said the stranger, "and I wanted to tell you, before you die, what happened after you ran away. My daughter Maria died bearing your child. She believed to the end that you would come back. So did your father, who was my best friend until he too died, broken with shame. Your own father cursed you to a death that would be unwept by anyone."

"Oh, my head," groaned Harley, as the pain stabbed him. The stranger put more brandy in his mouth. "You had better lick your lips on that, Georgi," he said. "It is the last you will ever taste."

"What is this about?" Harley muttered. "I don't know . . ."

"You'll know everything before I leave you," said the other. "For five years, since Maria died, I have looked into faces everywhere hoping to meet you. The newspapers printed your photograph and your address for me. The name of Termann didn't fool me, Georgi — remember, I have known you since childhood. And I saw that you were playing your old tricks, mixed up with a girl as usual.

There was deadly menace in the tone of his voice, and Harley braced himself to meet it. "But I don't know you," he said. "I never saw you in my life."

"Oh, yes, you know me," said the stranger, "and I want you to see me clearly once more before you die."

The stranger turned the flashlight on himself, a tall, sinewy old man with long, thin nose, high forehead and heavy chin.

"And I know you, Georgi," he said, turning the flashlight back, "and my daughter knew you, to her shame and sorrow. And it brought her to her death, for which now at long last you will pay, and here in my hand is the price."

"Stop," shouted Harley, "you're wrong. I am not Georgi Braun or Gustave Termann; I only took his name. My real name is Harley, John Harley; perhaps you've heard of me."

The stranger's lips drew back in a snarling smile. "Harley is dead," he said, "dead in his sins, by his own hand in Paris. I read about it."

In a torrent of words Harley poured out the truth, how he had killed Termann instead of himself and taken his name and papers. "If you don't believe me," he cried, "unbutton my shirt and see the money in the belt around my waist. You can take half of it if you want to. I tell you, I'm John Harley."

The old man looked at him contemptuously. "You were always clever with words, Georgi. That was how you fooled Maria, but not me."

"Oh, God," cried Harley, "you are wrong. You are wrong, I tell you. I never saw you or your daughter in my life. You make a terrible mistake."

"Not my mistake, this time," Georgi," yelled the old man madly, "not my mistake but yours — your last mistake."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SPEAKING OF CRIME

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The Short Shudder

MY LAST visit to New York City's Fourth Avenue, that Elysium of book-browsers, was a singularly profitable one, in which I turned up items ranging from the first edition of Samuel Warren's CONFESSIONS OF AN ATTORNEY to an Argentinian version of THE SIGN OF FOUR. But nothing else I found was quite so rewarding as F. Anstey's THE STATEMENT OF STELLA MABERLY (Appleton, 1896).

This strangely neglected account of a tortured mind, balanced in dreadful indecision between fantasy and fact, may well lay claim to being the first of the "psychological thrillers." Slightly stilted though its style may seem to us, it is still a powerful one; and a great portion of that power is due to the fact that it is an extremely short novel, of well under 50,000 words.

During the twenties and thirties, when the mystery novel was an elaborately plotted form, that plot scaffolding could sustain a length of 80,000 words, or even 100,000. Now the trend is toward the simplest, even sketchiest type of plot, with emphasis on sharp emotional impact — an effect best obtained in brevity; but custom insists on "standard novel length," and the result is unconscionable padding. There have been few mystery novels in the past year, particularly of the pursuit-suspense type, which would not have been twice as effective at half the length.

Which is why Hilda Lawrence and her editor are to be loudly congratulated on their good judgment in her latest book, DUET OF DEATH (Simon & Schuster). Rather than expand (i.e., pad) novelettes to book length, they have simply taken two of Miss Lawrence's magazine novelettes and published them together in book form. The result is the Rinehart school at its highest pitch of subtle and intelligent development, in two doses each far more satisfying than the average full-length novel. It's the short shudder that shocks.

The other solution to the length problem is exemplified by David Keith in his joyous BLUE HARPSICHORD (Dodd, Mead). Mr. Keith has simply returned to plotting in all its glory, weaving together items as diverse as hot harpsichord playing, medieval theology, Mozart opera, book-binding, Second Avenue bars . . . and of course sex and murder. There's rarely been so much plot in one novel, or so much sheer fun, and all wrought with the delightful deftness of assured technique into a magnificent Baedeker of Cloudcuckooland.

More deft amusement, blended with a chill or two and some fascinating background material on the syndi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cation of comic strips, is to be found in Jack Iams' DEATH DRAWS THE LINE (Morrow). The other early books of 1949 range from Patricia Wentworth's MISS SILVER COMES TO STAY (Lippincott) — and either I am softening or Miss Maud Silver is markedly improving with each recent book — through items a trifle below their authors' high standards, such as Peter Cheyney's DARK WANTON (Dodd, Mead), A. A. Fair's BEDROOMS HAVE WINDOWS (Morrow), and Aaron Marc Stein's THE SECOND BURIAL (Crime Club), to downright disappointment in the latest books from Agatha Christie and Manning Coles.

I know hardly one mystery writer who has not at some time had his pet theme anticipated by Mrs. Christie; but in CROOKED HOUSE (Dodd, Mead) she employs a motif once definitively treated by Barnaby Ross, and handles it with clumsy detection and an almost absolute absence of action. And Manning Coles's NOT NEGOTIABLE (Crime Club) is routine cops-and-robbers, with little trace of the Hambledon wit nor indeed much reason why one of the characters should be called Tommy Hambledon.

First novels of 1949 so far include Rae Foley's BONES OF CONTENTION (Dodd, Mead), agreeably written but amateurishly conceived; Day Keene's Hollywooden FRAMED IN GUILT (Mill-Morrow), far duller than his less pretentious pulp writings; and James Reach's LATE LAST NIGHT (Morrow), a spottily intelligent and interesting book, with possibly the most flagrant cheating in the technical history of murder solutions. By far the best of the firsts to date is James Benét's A PRIVATE KILLING (Harper) — a book which might have been better had it concentrated on the private instead of lugging in cardboard gangsters; but still a sensitive and observant novel which will not cause even the most devout admirer of the great family to wish that young Mr. Benét had chosen a pseudonym.

Flashback: Belated additions to my 1948 list include the reissue of Graham Greene's still vividly terrifying study in evil, BRIGHTON ROCK (Viking); Leslie Charteris' uneven but vastly amusing collection of short stories, SAINT ERRANT (Crime Club); the bright and Thirkellish debut of Seldon Truss with WHERE'S MR. CHUMLEY? (Crime Club); and Donald Hamilton's THE STEEL MIRROR (Rinehart), as powerful and subtle a pursuit novel as the year produced.

Miscellany: Sir Edward Victor Appleton, 1947 Nobel prize-winner in physics and new principal of the University of Edinburgh, announced that women "have got male authors beaten" in the detective field. . . . S. Kaftanov, in "Pravda," announced as a symptom of bourgeois decay that Western culture now has detective stories in place of Dickens. (What would Inspector Bucket and Datchery say?) . . . Keith Ward, in *Boy and Girl Meet Neurosis* ("The Screen Writer," September, 1948), made a long-needed onslaught on the pseudo-psychological school, which I wish I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had space to quote here at length. . . . Frank Gruber compiled for "The Antiquarian Bookman" the most authoritative and extensive checklist of Horatio Alger, Jr. yet published. . . . Crime Club at last raised its price to $2.25, leaving Simon & Schuster and McKay as (I believe) the only regular publishers of whodunits clinging to the traditional two dollars. . . . A. E. W. Mason died on November 22, 1948. Younger readers, who possibly know only his mistaken revival of Hanaud a year or so ago, may not realize how much Mason meant to the mystery field, as the outstanding example, in the long period between Wilkie Collins and E. C. Bentley, of a writer who strove to give the mystery story the stature and status of a novel. No true devotee of murder will forget THE HOUSE OF THE ARROW or AT THE VILLA ROSE (or my own favorite, THE PRISONER IN THE OPAL); nor will we forget the idioms and the astuteness of Hanaud of the Sûreté, nor the exquisite tastes and distastes of Mr. Ricardo, one of the few great Watsons. May their creator rest in peace.

Theatrical notes: William (one-half of Kelley) Roos is the author of the book for the loudly acclaimed Bobby Clark musical, AS THE GIRLS GO. . . . Denis Green, formerly co-author of the Sherlock Holmes radio show and co-creator of THE CASEBOOK OF GREGORY HOOD (and dedicatee of a Saint novel), returns to his earlier career of acting in the Cole Porter-Bella Spewack-Bill Shakespeare KISS ME, KATE. . . . Craig Rice has retired to the fastnesses of Big Bear Lake. (Who says that isn't a theatrical note?)

There is more entertainment than is obvious in the reviewing of mystery novels. I shall refrain from mentioning the authors and editors who let the following excerpts slip into print. They seem to indicate that the filler-editors of "The New Yorker" are overlooking a good source in not reading detective stories:

The Geiger counter roused itself a little more. Its metronome beat became that of a brisk one-step.

Curtis pushed the counter closer to the opened cavity in the block of lead. The clicking increased in tempo to *andante*.

"Wasn't it Byron who wrote, 'Come away, come away, Death. In sad cypress let me be laid'?"

"That was Shakespeare, Baby. Byron said, 'Here once through an alley Titanic, of cypress I roamed with my soul. In cypress, with Psyche my soul . . .' "

I shivered.

"Imagine your knowing things like that!"

None of which, of course, equals the all-time highs of the editor who published a mystery novel with the last chapter missing or the writer who based an entire published plot on having the *Lusitania* sailing in the wrong direction. The editor shall be nameless; the writer was Anthony Boucher.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WINNER OF A THIRD PRIZE: JOSEPH SHEARING

"Joseph Shearing" is one of the pen-names used by Mrs. Gabrielle Margaret Vere Campbell Long. Some of her other pseudonyms are Marjorie Bowen, George R. Preedy, Robert Paye, John Winch, and Margaret Campbell (Mrs. Long's maiden name). Under these various noms-de-plume Mrs. Long has had more than 140 books published — an astonishing and breath-taking professional record. As Joseph Shearing, Mrs. Long specializes in fiction based on famous real-life crimes and historic legal scandals, and as Joseph Shearing she has achieved international renown as both a serious criminologist and a superb writer.

Think of it: more than 140 published books! You would think that Mrs. Long has devoted all her waking life to constant, day-in and night-out, in-sickness and in-health writing. You would think she never had time for anything but ceaseless writing. But that is not true. Actually, Mrs. Long's career is even more astonishing than her published work would indicate. Mrs. Long has proved that it is possible for a woman to have her cake and eat it — to have a professional career and at the same time be a wife, mother, and homemaker. Mrs. Long has borne four children. Her first child was born in Sicily where she nursed her Sicilian husband until his death, under conditions of unbelievable privation in wartime Italy. She wrote to provide money to live on, and she did her writing while sitting at the foot of her sick husband's bed. And she found time for other things too: to paint and to execute elaborate panels of needlework. Her life has been one of never-ending toil and self-sacrifice, and whether she realizes it or not, it is a wondrously shining example.

"The Chinese Apple" reveals Joseph Shearing's mastery of mood, as well as her triumphant technique. It explores her deepest vein — the period piece. It might be called "The Gaslight" or "Angel Street" type of detective story. By either label you will find it a chilling, if belated, Christmas present . . .

THE CHINESE APPLE

by JOSEPH SHEARING

ISABELLE CROSLAND felt very depressed when the boat train drew into the vast London station. The gas lamps set at intervals down the platform did little more than reveal filth, fog, and figures huddled in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wraps and shawls. It was a mistake to arrive on Christmas Eve — a matter of missed trains, of indecision and reluctance about the entire journey. The truth was she had not wanted to come to London at all. She had lived in Italy too long to be comfortable in England. In Florence she had friends, admirers; she had what is termed "private means" and she was an expert in music. She performed a little on the harpsichord and she wrote a great deal about ancient musical instruments and ancient music. She had been married and widowed some years before and was a childless woman who had come to good terms with life — but with life in Florence, not London. Mrs. Crosland really rather resented the fact that she was performing a duty. She liked things to be taken lightly, even with a touch of malice, of heartlessness, and here she was in this gloomy, cold station, just because she ought to be here.

"How," she thought, as she watched the porter sorting out her baggage, "I dislike doing the right thing. It is never becoming, at least to me."

A widowed sister she scarcely remembered had died: there was a child, quite alone. She, this Lucy Bayward, had written; so had her solicitors. Mrs. Crosland was her only relation. Money was not needed, companionship was. At last it had been arranged: the child was coming up from Wiltshire and Mrs. Crosland was to meet her in London and take her back to Florence.

It would really be, Isabelle Crosland reflected, a flat sort of Christmas. She wished that she could shift her responsibility, and as the four-wheeled cab took her along the dingy streets, she wondered if it might not be possible for her to evade taking Lucy back to Italy.

London was oppressive. The gutters were full of dirty snow; overhead was a yellow fog.

"I was a fool," thought Mrs. Crosland, "ever to have left Florence. The whole matter could have been settled by letter."

She did not care for the meeting place. It was the old house in Islington where she and her sister Martha had been born and had passed their childhood. It was her own property and her tenant had lately left, so it was empty. Convenient, too, and suitable. Only Isabelle Crosland did not very much want to return to those sombre rooms. She had not liked her own childhood, nor her own youth. Martha had married, though a poor sort of man, and got away early. Isabelle had stayed on, too long, then married desperately, only saving herself by Italy and music. The south had saved her in another way, too. Her husband, who was a dull, retired half-pay officer, had died of malaria.

Now she was going back. On Christmas Eve nothing would be much altered; she had always let the house furnished. Why had she not sold, long ago, those heavy pieces of Jamaica mahogany? Probably out of cowardice, because she did not wish to face

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

up to writing, or hearing anything about them. There it was, just as she remembered it, Roscoe Square, with the church and graveyard in the centre, and the houses, each like one another as peas in a pod, with the decorous areas and railings and the semicircular fanlights over the doors.

The street lamps were lit. It was really quite late at night. "No wonder," Mrs. Crosland thought, "that I am feeling exhausted." The sight of the square chilled her: it was as if she had been lured back there by some malign power. A group of people were gathered round the house in the corner, directly facing her own that was Number Twelve. "Carols," she thought, "or a large party." But there seemed to be no children and the crowd was very silent.

There were lights in her own house. She noticed that bright façade with relief. Alike in the parlor and in the bedrooms above, the gas flared. Lucy had arrived then. That part of the arrangements had gone off well. The lawyers must have sent the keys, as Isabelle Crosland had instructed them to do, and the girl had had the good sense to get up to London before the arrival of the boat train.

Yet Mrs. Crosland felt unreasonably depressed. She would, after all, have liked a few hours by herself in the hateful house.

Her own keys were ready in her purse. She opened the front door and shuddered. It was as if she had become a child again and dreaded the strong voice of a parent.

There should have been a maid. Careful in everything that concerned her comfort, Mrs. Crosland had written to a woman long since in her employment to be in attendance. The woman had replied, promising compliance. But now she cried: "Mrs. Jocelyn! Mrs. Jocelyn!" in vain, through the gas-lit house.

The cabman would not leave his horse and his rugs, but her moment of hesitancy was soon filled; one of the mongrel idlers who, more frequently than formerly lounged about these streets, came forward. Mrs. Crosland's trunks and bags were placed in the hall, and she had paid her dues with the English money carefully acquired at Dover.

The cab drove away, soon lost in the fog. But the scrawny youth lingered. He pointed to the crowd on the other side of the square, a deeper patch amid the surrounding gloom.

"Something has happened there, mum," he whispered.

"Something horrible, you mean?" Mrs. Crosland was annoyed she had said this and added, "No, of course not — it is a gathering for Christmas." With this she closed her front door on the darkness and stood in the lamp-lit passage.

She went into the parlor, so well remembered, so justly hated.

The last tenant, selected prudently, had left everything in even too good a state of preservation. Save for some pale patches on the walls where pictures had been altered, everything was as it had been.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Glowering round, Mrs. Crosland thought what a fool she had been to stay there so long.

A fire was burning, and a dish of cakes and wine stood on the deep-red mahogany table.

With a gesture of bravado, Mrs. Crosland returned to the passage, trying to throw friendliness into her voice as she called out: "Lucy, Lucy, my dear, it is I, your aunt Isabelle Crosland."

She was vexed with herself that the words did not have a more genial sound. "I am ruined," she thought, "for all family relationship."

A tall girl appeared on the first landing.

"I have been waiting," she said, "quite a long time."

In the same second Mrs. Crosland was relieved that this was no insipid bore and resentful of the other's self-contained demeanor.

"Well," she said, turning it off with a smile. "It doesn't look as if I need have hurried to your assistance."

Lucy Bayward descended the stairs.

"Indeed, I assure you, I am extremely glad to see you," she said gravely.

The two women seated themselves in the parlor. Mrs. Crosland found Lucy looked older than her eighteen years and was also, in her dark, rather flashing way, beautiful. Was she what one might have expected Martha's girl to be? Well, why not?

"I was expecting Mrs. Jocelyn, Lucy."

"Oh, she was here. She got everything ready as you see — then I sent her home because it is Christmas Eve."

Mrs. Crosland regretted this; she was used to ample service. "We shall not be able to travel until after Christmas," she complained.

"But we can be very comfortable here," said Lucy smiling.

"No," replied Mrs. Crosland, the words almost forced out of her. "I don't think I can be comfortable here. I think we had better go to a hotel."

"But you arranged this meeting."

"I was careless. You can have no idea — you have not traveled?"

"No."

"Well, then, you can have no idea how different things seem in Florence, with the sun and one's friends about —"

"I hope we shall be friends."

"Oh, I hope so. I did not mean that — only the square and the house. You see, I spent my childhood here."

Lucy slightly shrugged her shoulders. She poured herself out a glass of wine. What a false impression those schoolgirlish letters had given! Mrs. Crosland was vexed, mostly at herself.

"You — since we have used the word — have friends of your own?" she asked.

Lucy bowed her dark head.

"Really," added Mrs. Crosland, "I fussed too much. I need not have undertaken all that tiresome traveling — at Christmas, too."

"I am sorry that you did — on my account, but please believe that you are being of the greatest help to me."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mrs. Crosland apologized at once.

"I am overtired. I should not be talking like this. I, too, will have a glass of wine. We ought to get to know each other."

They drank, considering one another carefully.

Lucy was a continuing surprise to Mrs. Crosland. She was not even in mourning, but wore a rather ill-fitting stone-colored satin; her sleek hair had recently been twisted into ringlets, and there was no doubt that she was slightly rouged.

"Do you want to come to Italy? Have you any plans for yourself?"

"Yes — and they include a trip abroad. Don't be afraid that I shall be a burden to you."

"This independence could have been expressed by letter," smiled Mrs. Crosland. "I have my own interests — that Martha's death interrupted —"

"Death always interrupts — someone or something, does it not?"

"Yes, and my way of putting it was harsh. I mean, you do not seem a rustic miss, eager for sympathy."

"It must be agreeable in Florence," said Lucy. "I dislike London."

"But you have not been here more than a few hours —"

"Long enough to dislike it —"

"And your own home, also?"

"You did not like your own youth, either, did you?" asked Lucy, staring.

"No, no, I understand. Poor Martha would be dull, and it is long since your father died. I see; a narrow existence."

"You might call it that. I was denied everything. I had not the liberty, the pocket money given to a kitchen maid."

"It was true of me also," said Mrs. Crosland, shocked at her own admission.

"One is left alone, to struggle with dark things," smiled Lucy. "It is not a place that I dislike, but a condition — that of being young, vulnerable, defenseless."

"As I was," agreed Mrs. Crosland. "I got away and now I have music."

"I shall have other things." Lucy sipped her wine.

"Well, one must talk of it; you are not what I expected to find. You are younger than I was when I got away," remarked Mrs. Crosland.

"Still too old to endure what I endured."

Mrs. Crosland shivered. "I never expected to hear this," she declared. "I thought you would be rather a flimsy little creature."

"And I am not?"

"No, indeed, you seem to me quite determined."

"Well, I shall take your small cases upstairs. Mrs. Jocelyn will be here in the morning."

"There's a good child." Mrs. Crosland tried to sound friendly. She felt that she ought to manage the situation better. It was one that she had ordained herself and now it was getting out of hand.

"Be careful with the smallest case in red leather: it has some English gold in it, and a necklace of Roman

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pearls that I bought as a Christmas present for you —"

Mrs. Crosland felt that the last part of this sentence fell flat. ". . . pearl beads, they are really very pretty."

"So are these." Lucy put her hand to her ill-fitting tucker and pulled out a string of pearls.

"The real thing," said Mrs. Crosland, soberly. "I did not know that Martha —"

Lucy unclasped the necklace and laid it on the table. The sight of this treasure loosened Mrs. Crosland's constant habit of control. She thought of beauty, of sea-water, of tears, and of her own youth, spilled and wasted away, like water running into sand.

"I wish I had never come back to this house," she said passionately.

Lucy went upstairs. Mrs. Crosland heard her moving about overhead. How well she knew that room. The best bedroom, where her parents had slept, the huge wardrobe, the huge dressing-table, the line engravings, the solemn air of tedium, the hours that seemed to have no end. What had gone wrong with life, anyway? Mrs. Crosland asked herself this question fiercely, daunted, almost frightened by the house.

The fire was sinking down and with cold hands she piled on the logs.

How stupid to return. Even though it was such a reasonable thing to do. One must be careful of these reasonable things. She ought to have done the unreasonable, the reckless thing, forgotten this old house in Islington and gone to some cheerful hotel.

The steps were advancing, retreating, overhead. Mrs. Crosland recalled old stories of haunted houses. How footsteps would sound in an upper story, and then on investigation, the room be found empty.

Supposing she were to go upstairs now and find the great bedroom forlorn and Lucy vanished! Instead, Lucy entered the parlor.

"I have had the warming pan in the bed for over two hours. The fire burns briskly, and your things are set out —"

Mrs. Crosland was grateful in rather, she felt, an apathetic manner. This journey had upset a painfully acquired serenity. She was really fatigued; the motion of the ship, the clatter of the train still made her senses swim.

"Thank you, Lucy, dear," she said, in quite a humble way, then leaning her head in her hand, and her elbow on the table, she began to weep.

Lucy regarded her quietly and drank another glass of wine.

"It is the house," whimpered Mrs. Crosland, "coming back to it — and those pearls — I never had a necklace like that —"

She thought of her friends, of her so-called successful life, and of how little she had really had.

She envied this young woman who had escaped in time.

"Perhaps you had an accomplice?" she asked cunningly.

"Oh, yes, I could have done nothing without that."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mrs. Crosland was interested, slightly confused by the wine and the fatigue. Probably, she thought, Lucy meant that she was engaged to some young man who had not been approved by Martha. But what did either of them mean by the word *accomplice?*

"I suppose Charles Crosland helped me," admitted his widow. "He married me and we went to Italy. I should never have had the courage to do that alone. And by the time he died, I found out about music, and how I understood it and could make money out of it —"

"Perhaps," she thought to herself, "Lucy will not want, after all, to come with me to Italy — what a relief if she marries someone. I don't really care if she has found a ruffian, for I don't like her — no, nor the duty, the strain and drag of it."

She was sure that it was the house making her feel like that. Because in this house she had done what she ought to have done so often. Such wretched meals, such miserable silences, such violences of speech. Such suppression of all one liked or wanted.

"I see that you must have suffered, Mrs. Crosland. I don't feel I can be less formal than that — we are strangers. I will tell you in the morning what my plans are —"

"I hardly came from Italy in the Christmas season to hear your plans," replied Mrs. Crosland with a petulance of which she was ashamed. "I imagined you as quite dependent and needing my care."

"I have told you that you are the greatest possible service to me," Lucy assured her, at the same time taking up the pearls and hiding them in her bosom. "I wear mourning when I go abroad, but in the house I feel it to be a farce," she added.

"I never wore black for my parents," explained Mrs. Crosland. "They died quite soon, one after the other; with nothing to torment, their existence became insupportable."

Lucy sat with her profile towards the fire. She was thin, with slanting eyebrows and a hollow at the base of her throat.

"I wish you would have that dress altered to fit you," remarked Mrs. Crosland. "You could never travel in it, either — a gray satin —"

"Oh, no, I have some furs and a warm pelisse of a dark-rose color."

"Then certainly you were never kept down as I was —"

"Perhaps I helped myself, afterwards. Is not that the sensible thing to do?"

"You mean you bought these clothes since Martha's death? I don't see how you had the time or the money." And Mrs. Crosland made a mental note to consult the lawyers as to just how Lucy's affairs stood.

"Perhaps you have greater means than I thought," she remarked. "I always thought Martha had very little."

"I have not very much," said Lucy. "But I shall know how to spend it. And how to make more."

Mrs. Crosland rose. The massive

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pieces of furniture seemed closing in on her, as if they challenged her very right to exist.

Indeed, in this house she had no existence; she was merely the wraith of the child, of the girl who had suffered so much in this place, in this house, in this square with the church and the graveyard in the centre, and from which she had escaped only just in time. Lucy also got to her feet.

"It is surprising," she sighed. "The amount of tedium there is in life. When I think of all the dull Christmases —"

"I, also," said Mrs. Crosland, almost in terror. "It was always so much worse when other people seemed to be rejoicing." She glanced round her with apprehension.

"When I think of all the affectations of good will, of pleasure —"

"Don't think of it," urged the younger woman. "Go upstairs where I have put everything in readiness for you."

"I dread the bedroom."

The iron bell clanged in the empty kitchen below.

"The waits," added Mrs. Crosland. "I remember when we used to give them sixpence, nothing more. But I heard no singing."

"There was no singing. I am afraid those people at the corner house have returned."

Mrs. Crosland remembered vaguely the crowd she had seen from the cab window, a blot of dark in the darkness.

"You mean that someone has been here before?" she asked. "What about?"

"There has been an accident, I think. Someone was hurt —"

"But what could that have to do with us?

"Nothing, of course. But they said they might return —"

"Who is 'they'?"

Mrs. Crosland spoke confusedly, and the bell rang again.

"Oh, do go, like a good child," she added. She was rather glad of the distraction. She tried to think of the name of the people who had lived in the house on the opposite corner. Inglis — was not that it? And one of the family had been a nun, a very cheerful smiling nun, or had she recalled it all wrongly?

She sat shivering over the fire, thinking of those past musty Christmas Days, when the beauty and magic of the season had seemed far away, as if behind a dense wall of small bricks. That had always been the worst of it — that somewhere, probably close at hand, people had really been enjoying themselves.

She heard Lucy talking with a man in the passage. The accomplice, perhaps? She was inclined to be jealous, hostile.

But the middle-aged and sober-looking person who followed Lucy into the parlor could not have any romantic implications.

He wore a pepper-and-salt pattern suit and carried a bowler hat. He seemed quite sure of himself, yet not to expect any friendliness.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I am sorry to disturb you again," he said.

"I am sorry that you should," agreed Mrs. Crosland. "But on the other hand, my memories of this house are by no means pleasant."

"Name of Teale, Henry Teale," said the stranger.

"Pray be seated," said Mrs. Crosland.

The stranger, this Mr. Teale, took the edge of the seat, as if very diffident. Mrs. Crosland was soon fascinated by what he had to say.

He was a policeman in private clothes. Mrs. Crosland meditated on the word "private" — "private life," "private means." He had come about the Inglis affair, at the corner house.

"Oh, yes, I recall that was the name, but we never knew anyone. Who are they now — the Inglis family?"

"I've already told Miss Bayward here — it was an old lady, for several years just an old lady living with a companion —"

"And found dead, you told me, Mr. Teale," remarked Lucy.

"Murdered is what the surgeon says and what was suspected from the first."

"I forgot that you said that, Mr. Teale. At her age it does not seem to matter very much — you said she was over eighty years of age, did you not?" asked Lucy, pouring the detective a glass of wine.

"Very old, nearly ninety years of age, I understand, Miss Bayward. But murder is murder."

Mrs. Crosland felt this affair to be an added weariness. Murder in Roscoe Square, on Christmas Eve. She felt that she ought to apologize to Lucy.

"I suppose that was what the crowd had gathered for," she remarked.

"Yes, such news soon gets about, ma'am. A nephew called to tea and found her — dead."

Mr. Teale went over, as if it were a duty, the circumstances of the crime. The house had been ransacked and suspicion had fallen on the companion, who had disappeared. Old Mrs. Inglis had lived so much like a recluse that no one knew what she possessed. There had been a good deal of loose money in the house, the nephew, Mr. Clinton, thought. A good deal of cash had been drawn every month from the Inglis bank account, and very little of it spent. The companion was a stranger to Islington. Veiled and modest, she had flitted about doing the meagre shopping for the old eccentric, only for the last few weeks.

The woman she had replaced had left in tears and temper some months ago. No one knew where this creature had come from — probably an orphanage; she must have been quite friendless and forlorn to have taken such a post.

"You told me all this," protested Lucy.

"Yes, miss, but I did say that I would have to see Mrs. Crosland when she arrived —"

"Well, you are seeing her," re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

marked that lady. "And I cannot help you at all. One is even disinterested. I lived, Mr. Teale, so cloistered a life when I was here that I knew nothing of what was going on — even in the square."

"So I heard from Miss Bayward here, but I thought you might have seen someone, I'm not speaking of the past, but of the present —"

"Seen someone here — on Christmas Eve —"

Mr. Teale sighed, as if indeed he had been expecting too much.

"We've combed the neighborhood, but can't find any trace of her —"

"Why should you? Of course, she has fled a long way off —"

"Difficult with the railway stations and then the ports all watched."

"You may search again through the cellars if you wish," said Lucy. "I am sure that my aunt won't object —"

Mrs. Crosland put no difficulties in the way of the detective, but she felt the whole situation was grotesque.

"I hope she escapes." Mrs. Crosland, increasingly tired and confused by the wine she had drunk without eating, spoke without her own volition. "Poor thing — shut up — caged —"

"It was a very brutal murder," said Mr. Teale, indifferently.

"Was it? An overdraught of some sleeping potion, I suppose?"

"No, ma'am — David and Goliath, the surgeon said. A rare kind of murder. A great round stone in a sling — a lady's scarf, might be — and pretty easy to get in the dusk round the river ways."

Mrs. Crosland laughed. The picture of this miserable companion lurking at the end of a dismal day round the dubious dockland streets to find a target for her skill with sling and stone — it seemed absurd.

"I know what you are laughing at," said Mr. Teale without feeling. "But she found her target. It was the shining skull of Mrs. Inglis, nodding in her chair —"

"One might understand the temptation," agreed Mrs. Crosland. "But I doubt the skill."

"There is a lovely walled garden," suggested the detective. "And, as I said, these little byway streets. Anyway, there was the head smashed in, neatly — no suffering, you understand."

"Oh, very great suffering, for such a thing to be possible," broke out Mrs. Crosland. "On the part of the murderess, I mean —"

"I think so, too," said Lucy soberly.

"That is not for me to say," remarked the detective. "I am to find her if I can. There is a fog and all the confusion of Christmas Eve parties, and waits, and late services at all the churches."

Mrs. Crosland impulsively drew back the curtains. Yes, there was the church, lit up, exactly as she recalled it, light streaming from the windows over the graveyard, altar, tombs and headstones, sliding into oblivion.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Where would a woman like that go?" asked Lucy, glancing over Mrs. Crosland's shoulder at the churchyard.

"That is what we have to find out," said Mr. Teale cautiously. "I'll be on my way again, ladies, just cautioning you against any stranger who might come here, on some pretext. One never knows."

"What was David's stone? A polished pebble? I have forgotten." Mrs. Crosland dropped the curtains over the view of the church, and the dull fog twilight of evening in the gas-lit square.

"The surgeon says it must have been a heavy stone, well aimed, and such is missing. Mr. Clinton, the nephew, her only visitor and not in her confidence, always noticed such a weapon on each of his visits on the old lady's table."

"How is that possible?" asked Mrs. Crosland.

Mr. Teale said that the object was known as the Chinese apple. It was of white jade, curved like the fruit, with a leaf attached, all carved in one and beautifully polished. The old lady was very fond of it, and it was a most suitable weapon.

"But this dreadful companion," said Mrs. Crosland, now perversely revolted by the crime, "could not have had time to practise with this — suitable weapon. She had not been with Mrs. Inglis long enough."

"Ah," smiled Mr. Teale. "We don't know where she was before, ma'am. She might have had a deal of practice in some lonely place — birds, ma'am, and rabbits. Watching in the woods, like boys do."

Mrs. Crosland did not like this picture of a woman lurking in coverts with a sling. She bade the detective good evening, and Lucy showed him to the door.

In the moment that she was alone, Mrs. Crosland poured herself another glass of wine. When Lucy returned, she spoke impulsively.

"Oh, Lucy, that is what results when people are driven too far — they kill and escape with the spoils, greedily. I do wish this had not happened. What sort of woman do you suppose this may have been? Harsh, of course, and elderly —"

"Mr. Teale, when he came before, said she might be in almost any disguise."

"Almost any disguise," repeated Mrs. Crosland, thinking of the many disguises she had herself worn until she had found herself in the lovely blue of Italy, still disguised, but pleasantly enough. She hoped that this mask was not now about to be torn from her; the old house was very oppressive, it had been foolish to return. A relief, of course, that Lucy seemed to have her own plans. But the house was what really mattered: the returning here and finding everything the same, and the memories of that dreadful childhood.

Lucy had suffered also, it seemed; odd that she did not like Lucy, did not feel any sympathy with her or her schemes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At last she found her way upstairs and faced the too familiar bedroom. Her own was at the back of the house — that is, it had been. She must not think like this: her own room was in the charming house of the villa in Fiesole; this place had nothing to do with her at all.

But it had, and the knowledge was like a lead cloak over her. Of course it had. She had returned to meet, not Lucy, but her own childhood.

Old Mrs. Inglis — how did she fit in?

Probably she had always been there, even when the woman who was now Isabelle Crosland had been a child. Always there, obscure, eccentric, wearing out a succession of companions until one of them brained her with the Chinese apple, the jade fruit, slung in a lady's scarf.

"Oh, dear," murmured Mrs. Crosland, "what has that old, that very old woman, got to do with me?"

Her cases were by her bedside. She was too tired to examine them. Lucy had been scrupulous in putting out her toilet articles. She began to undress. There was nothing to do but to rest. What was it to her that a murderess was being hunted round Islington. What had Mr. Teale said? The stations, the docks. . . .

She was half-undressed and had pulled out her wrapper when the front door bell rang.

Hastily covering herself up, she was out on the landing. At least this was an excuse not to get into the big formal bed where her parents had died, even if it was only Mr. Teale returned.

Lucy was already in the hall, speaking to someone. The gaslight in the passage illuminated the girl in the stone-colored satin and the man on the threshold to whom she spoke.

It was not Mr. Teale.

Isabelle Crosland, halfway down the stairs, had a sharp glance of a sharp face, vividly lit. A young man, with his collar turned up and a look of expectation in his brilliant eyes. He said something that Isabelle Crosland could not hear and then Lucy closed the heavy front door. Glancing up at her aunt she said:

"Now we are shut in for the night."

"Who was that?" asked Mrs. Crosland, vexed that Lucy had discerned her presence.

"Only a neighbor."

Lucy's tone was reassuring. She advised her aunt to go to bed.

"Really it is getting very late. The church is dark again. All the people have gone home."

"Which room have you, Lucy dear?"

"That which you had, I suppose — the large room at the back of the house."

"Oh, yes — that —"

"Well, do not concern yourself — it has been rather a disagreeable evening but it is over now."

Lucy, dark and pale, stood in the doorway, hesitant for a second. Mrs. Crosland decided, unreasonably, not to kiss her and bade her a quick good night of a forced cheerfulness.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Alone, she pulled the chain of the gas-ring and was at once in darkness. Only wheels of light across the ceiling showed the passing of a lonely hansom cab.

Perhaps Mr. Teale going home.

Isabelle Crosland could not bring herself to sleep on the bed after all. Wrapped in traveling rugs, snatched up in the dark, she hunched on the couch. Presently she slept, but with no agreeable dreams. Oppressive fancies lay heavily on her and several times she woke, crying out.

It was with a dismal sense of disappointment that she realized each time that she was not in Florence.

With the dawn she was downstairs. Christmas morning!

No sign of Lucy, and the cold dismal house was like a trap, a prison.

Almost crying with vexation, Mrs. Crosland was forced to look into the room that once had been her own. The bed had not been slept in. On the white honeycomb coverlet was a package and a note.

This, a single sheet of paper, covered an opened letter. Mrs. Crosland stared at the open letter which was signed *Lucy Bayward.* It was a childish sort of scrawl in which the writer excused herself for not being able to reach London until after the holidays.

The note was in a different hand:

I promised to let you know my plans. I am away down the river with my accomplice. While taking refuge in your empty house I found this letter. The whole arrangement was entirely useful to me. I left the Roman pearls for the real Lucy, as I had those of my late employer, but I took the gold. No one will ever find us. I leave you a Christmas present.

Mrs. Crosland's cold fingers undid the package. In the ghastly half-light she saw the Chinese apple.

FOR MYSTERY FANS — these spine-tingling mystery thrillers are now on sale at your newsstand:

A MERCURY MYSTERY — "Legacy in Blood" (formerly "Flowers for the Judge"), by Margery Allingham. "One of her best . . . a well-written, exciting tale," says the *New York Herald Tribune.*

BESTSELLER MYSTERY — "Make My Bed Soon," by John Stephen Strange. "Action and suspense highly commendable," reports the *Saturday Review of Literature.*

A JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY — "The Frightened Man," by Dana Chambers. On this, the *New York Herald Tribune* comments: "Plenty of terror . . . a smooth item, skillfully blended."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THRICE HE ASSAY'D

In 1938 Howard Haycraft edited THE BOYS' BOOK OF GREAT DETECTIVE STORIES (*Harper*), *the first of a series of three anthologies especially designed to appeal to "modern boys in their teens." The volume contained thirteen stories, each having "for its central character an outstanding fictional detective." The book started with a tale by Poe, and in chronological order carried the detective story from 1841 through 1912. The thirteen sleuths were: Poe's Auguste Dupin, Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, Morrison's Martin Hewitt, Barr's Eugène Valmont, Futrelle's The Thinking Machine, Freeman's Dr. Thorndyke, Leblanc's Arsène Lupin, Orczy's The Old Man in the Corner, MacHarg and Balmer's Luther Trant, Adams's Average Jones, Chesterton's Father Brown, Post's Uncle Abner, and Reeve's Craig Kennedy . . . In 1940 Mr. Haycraft brought out the second volume in his proposed trilogy —* THE BOYS' SECOND BOOK OF GREAT DETECTIVE STORIES (*Harper*). *This volume contained fourteen stories, each again presenting a famous detective character. Taking up where the first book left off, the second volume covered the period from Bentley and Bramah through Edgar Wallace — "one of the richest periods in the history of detective fiction." The fourteen investigators were: Bentley's Philip Trent, Bramah's Max Carrados, O'Higgins's Barney Cook, Fletcher's Paul Campenhaye, Christie's Hercule Poirot, Bailey's Reggie Fortune, McNeile's Bulldog Drummond, Anderson's Deputy Parr, Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey, Coles's Superintendent Wilson, Cohen's Jim Hanvey, Rhode's Dr. Priestley, Berkeley's Roger Sheringham, and Wallace's Mr. J. G. Reeder.*

Now, at the time the second book appeared, Mr. Haycraft announced that there would be a third and final volume which would probably start with Ellery Queen and bring the detective short story up to date. Unfortunately, Mr. Haycraft was not able to hold to his schedule. For one thing, the war intervened, and while in the service Mr. Haycraft had neither the time nor the inclination to edit a detective-story anthology. But we are sure that one of these days Mr. Haycraft will go back to his appointed task and complete the trilogy.

Which detectives will Mr. Haycraft select for his third volume? Well, let's speculate. Taking him at his word, there will be Ellery Queen. Surely none of the following can be overlooked: Crofts's Inspector French, Train's Mr. Tutt, Stribling's Professor Poggioli, Charteris's The Saint, Abbot's Thatcher Colt, Frome's Mr. Pinkerton, Allingham's Albert Campion, Dickson's H.M. or Carr's Dr. Gideon Fell, MacHarg's O'Malley, Hammett's Sam Spade or The Continental Op, Wilde's P. Moran, Palmer's Hildegarde Withers, and de la Torre's Dr. Sam: Johnson.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

How many stories does that make for Volume Three? Fourteen. In his first book Mr. Haycraft used thirteen stories. In his second, he went to fourteen. If there is any consistency in logic, or logic in consistency, then Mr. Haycraft will undoubtedly select fifteen stories for Volume Three.

That leaves us one shy in our suggestions. Let's think back: in all the shop-talks we have had with Howard Haycraft, has he ever indicated who that fifteenth ferret might be? Yes, we remember he did. He once mentioned that he would like to include that hero of more than a hundred tales, that typically American character, that magazine and movie favorite — if only he could find a short story in which that famous fiction character turned detective.

Who, you ask? Why, Clarence Budington Kelland's Scattergood Baines, of course. You say Scattergood never did any sleuthing? Oh, yes, he did: that shrewd and kindly Vermonter could "git the true inwardness" of an assault-and-robbery — and that's true detecting. And Scattergood has his own manhunting method too: "I dunno's I hold much with clues, not the kind ye kin see with your eyes and tetch with your fingers."

Yes, there is at least one short story in which Scattergood Baines acts the part of an authentic detective, in the purest American style. Here it is, Howard, with our compliments.

AN OUNCE OF CURIOSITY

by CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND

SCATTERGOOD BAINES was driving along the road between Higgins Bridge and Coldriver when, with a suddenness which would have startled a great many people, the witch hopplebushes parted and a young man lunged into the road. He was hatless, scratched by briers, panting. Scattergood's ancient mare shied and pretended she was in her youth, which amused the old hardware merchant.

"Beats all what mem'ries we got," he said to her. "The idee of a body your age cuttin' up didoes!"

Then he turned to the young man, who was picking himself up from the dust and poising for renewed flight.

"Bear chasin' ye?" he asked genially. "Never knowed one of these here black bear to chase a feller. It's what I'd term a int'restin' incident."

The young man stiffened at sound of that kindly voice, white teeth showing between lips that curled in a snarl.

"Don't try to stop me," he said tensely. "You better mind your own business."

Copyright, 1932, by Clarence Budington Kelland

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Allus calc'lated to," said Scattergood. "But if you're runnin' fer a train, it's gone."

It was evident the young man was beside himself with fear.

"I want that horse," he said.

"Ye hain't got many competitors fer her," said Scattergood. "I dunno's I've had a bony fidy offer fer her in fifteen year. Who's a-chasin' ye?"

"Don't you meddle with me. I tell you I won't be caught. Get out of that surrey!"

"Don't mind givin' ye a ride," said Scattergood. "Be they bears, or Injuns, or sheriffs?"

"It's a posse," said the boy.

"What did ye do?"

"Nothing. . . . Nothing. . . . I didn't do it; but they got it proved on me."

"Um. . . . They kin prove ye done what ye didn't do, eh? How old be ye?"

"Twenty," said the boy.

"Git in," said Scattergood.

The boy hesitated. "Git in," said Scattergood and, strangely enough, the fugitive obeyed after a moment's pause.

"Old linen duster in behind," said Scattergood. "Git it out and on. I calc'late the's a felt hat there too, that I use on rainy days. Rain's bad fer straw. Put 'em on."

The boy obeyed, and Scattergood watched him out of the corner of his eye.

"The idee is," said he, "that I kind of git puzzled over a feller that hain't done nothin' but it kin be proved onto him. It gits me to itchin' with curiosity. I dunno's the's anybody in Coldriver that's troubled with curiosity the way I be."

"Do — do you mean you're going to help me get away?"

"Wal, I wouldn't go so fur's to say that. I hain't goin' to put you onto no express train, if that's what you mean. I dunno's I know jest what I am to do with ye — outside of listenin' to ye."

"But if they come — if they catch up with us?"

"Wal, in sich a eventuality, I'd pull that there hat down perty fur and keep my mouth shet," said Scattergood. "Listens like somebody a comin' now."

The young man stiffened and looked about him like a hunted animal.

"Ye better git kind of limp in the spine, like ye wa'n't inter'sted special," said Scattergood, "and scrouge down some."

A floundering on the hillside, voices calling, a jingling as of hardware became audible, and presently two men leaped into the road twenty yards behind. They spied the rig and bellowed after it.

"Hey, there!" shouted a peremptory voice.

Scattergood pulled up leisurely. "Bellerin' at me?" he asked nonchalantly.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Baines! I'm headin' a posse, and we're right on his heels."

"How be ye, Williams? How's the family? Whose heels be ye onto?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Feller that robbed Ol' Man Sanford, to Higgins Bridge, and done him a job of twistin' the ol' feller's knuckles with a pair of pliers, and bashed him over the head some. Left him fer dead; but he hain't. Calc'late he's got a perty thick skull onto him."

"And you're onto the heels of this here miscreant?"

"I bet he hain't a quarter of a mile ahead. Young feller. Kind of slender. Hain't seen nothin' of sich a man?"

"Git much money?" asked Scattergood.

"About thirty-eight hundred."

"Um. . . . I dunno's I'd go so fur's to let my knuckles git twisted to save that much," said Scattergood. "How d'ye know this feller you're chasin' done the deed?"

"Sanford *said* it was him."

"Recognize him plain, eh?"

"The feller was wearin' a red handkerchief over his face."

"Knew him by a strawberry mark, mebbe?"

"No, but he said it was him. And folks seen him a-comin' down Sanford's lane."

"With the pliers into his hand?" suggested Scattergood.

"Didn't have no pliers, but he was a-runnin'."

"With thutty-eight hundred dollars in his hand?" said Scattergood.

"Hain't nobuddy seen the money," said the deputy. "The's a heap more evidence, too."

"Seems like the' was most enough," said Scattergood.

"This here feller," said the deputy, "was clerkin' in the ol' man's store summers, and goin' to the State College winters. So he had a chance to know Sanford's habits and all, and the way he wouldn't never trust no big sum to a bank."

"Um. Them college fellers is apt to do anythin'," said Scattergood.

"On top of it all," said the deputy, "Sanford let him git through last night, and I calc'late the young feller was perty aggravated over it."

Up in that country a man is never fired from a job; he is never discharged, and he never quits. The whole thing is handled by the diplomatic phrase, "He got through."

"How come he to git away from ye?" asked Scattergood.

"He slep' back of the store. When this here deed was discovered, quite a number of folks gathered together down there; but nobuddy dast go in on account of him bein' desprit. So they hollered that he better come out peaceable."

"Uh-huh. Did he come?"

"He come as fur's the door and asks what's the rumpus, and somebody yells he was wanted fer robbin' Sanford, so he kind of stands a minute and then says he'll git his hat and coat and come along, and then he goes back fer 'em, and the next we know a kid hollers that he's hyperin' across lots fer the woods. So we got organized and set out to ketch him."

"Good luck to ye," said Scattergood. "G-bye."

The deputy and his companion shuffled off down the road and disap-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

peared around the bend. Scattergood did not cluck to his mare, but sat with chin on chest and eyes half-closed until the young man in the seat beside him squirmed with anxiety. Presently the old hardware merchant spoke.

"I'm a deppity myself," he said.

The boy started, gathered himself to leap from the surrey.

"Hold your hosses," said Scattergood mildly. "I'm jest considerin' this and that. So long's I'm a deppity and you're in my custody, I hain't breakin' no law helpin' a fugitive to escape, be I? Eh?"

The boy made an inarticulate sound in his throat.

"It's handy bein' a deppity," said Scattergood. "Now, here you be as much under arrest as a feller kin git, and no harm done to nobuddy. Not till things simmers down some, and we kin git to look at what's happened 'thout havin' the high strikes."

"I won't be caught," said the boy hoarsely.

"You *be* caught," said Scattergood; "and I calc'late you're goin' to *stay* caught till I'm through with ye. Now, ye wouldn't think, to look at me, how spry I be! So jest sit quiet and don't compel me to take no steps. If you done this here thing you're a'goin' to the pen'tentiary fer it. But if you didn't do it, then I aim to see you don't go to no pen'tentiary."

"I didn't," said the boy. "I didn't take his money or hurt him."

"But you was to his house."

"Yes."

"What fer?"

"To ask him to let me stay on. It wasn't much of a job, but it gave me time to study, and I saved 'most every cent I made."

"How come he to let you git through?"

"It was on account of his granddaughter."

"Um. . . . Perty gal?"

The boy nodded.

"He ketched you courtin' her?"

"He saw me kiss her," said the boy.

"Dew tell!"

"She works in the store, too. She's an orphan, but Mr. Sanford won't let her live with him. He lives all alone. He makes her work, and only pays her just enough so that she can live with some people who run a boarding house."

"Objected to her kissin' a feller, did he?"

"He said she was going to have his money when he was through with it, and he wasn't going to have any young spriggins like me trying to make up to her and get it."

"I've knowed sich things to happen," said Scattergood. . . . "G'dap there. G'long!"

There was silence for a time as they drove along the pleasant road, then Scattergood cleared his throat. "If it turns out ye hain't the miscreant," he said, "I'll put ye in a job till this here college opens up."

The boy said nothing. There were things more important to consider now than jobs or educations.

"What are you going to do?" he asked anxiously.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Git the true inwardness of this here matter," said Scattergood. "In the meantime, the' hain't never been nobuddy more arrested 'n what you be at this present moment. Young feller, you're in custody, you be. . . . What say your name was?"

"Ben Martin."

"And what's the name of this gal you was keepin' comp'ny with?"

"Susan Briggs."

"His daughter's gal, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Be ye goin' to do what I tell ye 'thout makin' a fuss?"

Young Martin turned to look steadily into Scattergood's face.

"I've heard of you, Mr. Baines," he said. "I put myself in your hands."

"G'dap!" Scattergood said to his mare.

Scattergood drove by a somewhat circuitous route to his farm on the outskirts of Coldriver, where he conducted Ben Martin into the kitchen.

"Mandy," he said to his wife, "I calc'late you better feed up this here dangerous character, so's he'll be too logy to run. They say he's guilty of 'most everythin', short of murder."

"I calc'late even a murderer gits hungry," said Mandy.

"He's under arrest," said Scattergood. "I done it personal and private. Now I got to go out and see if he done the deed. Kin you 'n' him git along together peaceable while I'm away?"

"I don't b'lieve we'll have words," said Mandy.

Scattergood turned to the boy. "If you hain't here when I git back," he said, "I'll be kind of disapp'inted."

"I'll be here," said Ben.

Scattergood drove into town and hired a car and driver to take him to Higgins Bridge. Once in that village, he drove to Old Man Sanford's house, a quarter of a mile from the river, and walked in without the formality of rapping. A neighbor woman sat in the haircloth rocker.

"How's he?" asked Scattergood.

"Restin' easy," said the woman, nodding toward the bedroom door.

Scattergood walked in and stood at the foot of the bed, looking down at the wizened face with its fringe of whiskers which lay on the pillow.

"How be ye?" he asked.

"Nigh dead," said Sanford. "Have they ketched the miscreant?"

"I hain't sure," said Scattergood. "It was Ben Martin, eh? Recognize him plain?"

"It couldn't of been nobuddy else. Ben was here fifteen minutes before it happened a-beggin' me to give him back his job."

"Which," said Scattergood, "you wouldn't do?"

"Not by a jugful," said Mr. Sanford. "He went away, and then he come back with a handkerchief over his face, and he hit me with the pliers and tied me up and twisted my knuckles till I told him where the money was."

"Recognize his voice?"

"He talked funny so I wouldn't know him — like he had a mouthful of mush."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Scattergood turned his back for an instant and then faced Sanford again. "Did it sound like this?" he asked in a voice which had lost its distinctness and had become, somehow, loose and, if one may use the word to describe a sound, flaccid.

"Dog-goned if it didn't!" said Old Man Sanford.

"I jest wondered," said Scattergood.

"The' hain't found the money yit, have they?"

"I hain't heard tell," said Scattergood. Then, after a pause, "Hope to see ye around soon. Uh-huh. Calc'late your hand'll be tender fer quite a spell. G-bye."

"G'bye," said Old Man Sanford, and he turned his face to the wall disconsolately, for the loss of thirty-eight hundred dollars rested heavily upon his heart.

Scattergood paused in the dining-room. "Kitchen been redd up since this here outrage was done?" he asked.

The neighbor woman sniffed. "Didn't dast to touch it. Deppity sheriff give orders. He says the' may be clues a-layin' around. Huh! If that there coot found him a clue he wouldn't know whether to let it set on his lap like a baby or fat it up to exhibit at the fair."

"Calc'late I'll look in," said Scattergood. "I dunno's I ever see a clue hangin' around in its nat'ral state."

He pushed open the kitchen door and stood peering into the room which had been the scene of last night's occurrences. Old Man Sanford was a scrupulous housekeeper. No unwashed dishes were visible; the floor was spotless; everything was in its place — everything but an overturned chair and certain lengths of clothes-line which had been cut from the limbs of Mr. Sanford when he had been released. Scattergood examined the rope: the knots were just knots. They told nothing of the age, size, color of eyes, or previous condition of servitude of the criminal.

The old hardware man spent five minutes examining the kitchen; but came out equipped with no more information as to the identity of the miscreant than he had carried in.

"See any of them clues of the deppity's?" asked the neighbor woman.

"Nary," said Scattergood. "I dunno's I hold much with clues, not the kind ye kin see with your eyes and tetch with your fingers. If I was a crim'nal, and kind of smart and contrivin', seems to me I'd furnish a sight of them clues. Or else I'd be cautious and not leave none. A smart man could come nigh to bewilderin' the officers of the law if he set his mind to it. I bet you I could up and commit me a crime and have the sheriff arrestin' the Baptis' minister fer it. Sich clues kin be made up as easy as whittlin' a stick."

"Mebbe so," said the woman.

"Uh-huh. Seems as though. But the's one kind of clue can't be made up, and that's the kind ye can't see or tetch."

"Then how ye goin' to know it's there?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Ma'am," said Scattergood, "it all lays in the capabilities of the human heart. The's men that jest can't whistle when they're a-walkin' up a road on a summer mornin'. The's men that could shoot ye down if it suited their purpose, but couldn't rob ye under no circumstances, and the's men that could pick a glass eye out of your head whilst ye was asleep, but couldn't bring themselves to lay a hand on ye in violence. Them, ma'am, is the kind of clues I was referrin' to. And the feller don't live that kin disguise 'em, or change 'em, or make 'em fit anybody but himself."

"Dew tell. And be the' any sich around here?"

"They're around everywhere, ma'am, if ye got the eyes to see 'em, and the understandin' heart to know what they signify."

"I calc'late these here ones signify that Ben Martin done a perty mean trick."

"Know Ben perty well, ma'am?"

"As well's most."

"If Ben's name hadn't been mentioned, would this here crime make ye think of him right off? I mean, ma'am, do ye ketch a resemblance to Ben in it? Human actions, ma'am, got to resemble their doers like children resemble parents."

"Mr. Baines," she said severely, "you talk like you was a button short."

"Mebbe I be," said Scattergood. "Mebbe I be. But bein' so makes all the difference, ma'am, between livin' and bein' alive."

"Jest like suthin' makes a difference betwixt six and a half a dozen."

"What I'm tellin' ye, ma'am. The' kin be sich a vast difference betwixt six and a half a dozen that it 'ud throw a king off'n his throne, or topple down a buildin'. Ma'am, it's nigh to bein' fatal if ye got too much common sense. Common sense, ma'am, kin be a dreadful curse."

"You talk," she said, "like it hadn't never cursed you much to speak of! Mr. Baines," she added, "I hain't never heard it said ye was crazy."

"No," said Scattergood; "but I calc'late you won't rest easy till ye start circulatin' the report. G'-bye, ma'am."

Scattergood's subsequent investigations took channels which might not have been approved by one wise in the efficient methods of the police. For instance, he was driven to Sanford's store, where he talked to Susan Briggs.

"How be ye, Susan?" he asked.

She raised her head to look at him, with dumb misery in her eyes.

"Name's Baines," he said. "Scattergood Baines, of Coldriver. Kind of worried about Ben, eh?"

"I — I can't bear to think of his being chased like — like some animal," she said brokenly.

"If he done it," said Scattergood gravely, "he deserves to git chased."

"He *couldn't* do it," she said.

"What gives ye that idee? Strong enough, hain't he? He was there or thereabouts, wa'n't he? He *could* 'a' done it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Men don't commit crimes with their hands," she said; "they commit them with their hearts."

Scattergood eyed her sharply, and cleared his throat. "H'm, Ben's got a heart, hain't he? Same's any feller."

"It's not that kind of heart, Mr. Baines. If you knew him you'd see what I mean."

"I calc'late to foller ye. What ye mean is if ye stand alongside of a pile of stove wood all split fur burnin', and the's a fiddle a-layin' beside it, why, you know right off the fiddle couldn't of done the splittin'."

"Yes," she said.

"How," he asked, "d'ye know Ben's a fiddle and not an ax?"

"Because," she said, "he was gentle. Not that he was a coward. Ben wouldn't be afraid. But it turned him sick to see anything suffer. He'd go all white and trembly. No matter how hard he wanted to torture something, he *couldn't*. And I can't bear to think of him now — hunted and half-crazy and hungry and thirsty."

"Um. I calc'late he hain't hungry nor thirsty. Nor hunted much. At this here present minute he's a-settin' in my kitchen with a full stummick."

"Mr. Baines!"

"I run onto him by accident," said Scattergood, "and kind of figgered I'd better look into things. Got any idee where I better start lookin'?"

"No. . . . No. . . . I can't imagine who could do such a dreadful thing."

"It was somebody knows Ol' Man Sanford well," said Scattergood. "It was somebody that knowed his ways and watched and studied him. . . . Your grandpa seen Ben a-kissin' ye?"

"Yes," she said simply.

"You must 'a' picked a bad time."

"He'd gone out to his dinner," said Susan, "and came back unexpectedly. He just stood in the door and scowled, and said, 'I thought I'd ketch ye.'"

"Jest like that," said Scattergood. "Um. . . . Sneaked back a-purpose."

"He said he'd heard we were carrying on," she said fiercely. "But we weren't carrying on. We meant it. It was honest."

"Now, who d'ye s'pose told him?" asked Scattergood. "Anybody else makin' up to ye?"

She blushed, hesitated. "I bet the' was several," said Scattergood. "Jest gimme their names."

"Well, there was Jim Leslie and Peter Banks and Ray Welch. But I didn't care for any of them."

"Um. . . . If I was you, I'd kind of mislay my tongue for the day. G'-bye," said Scattergood.

He spent that night in the Higgins Bridge hotel renewing old acquaintances and making new ones. During the evening the majority of the male residents of the village dropped in at the hostelry to discuss the most exciting event which had taken place in years. Scattergood studied them, talked with them, but, curiously enough, his interest seemed to turn rather to horses than to crime.

Early the next morning he went out to look at horses, and spent the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

major part of the day in opening equine mouths, observing equine teeth and legs and paces. In the afternoon he called again upon Old Man Sanford to ask one question: Who told him Ben Martin and Susan Briggs were carrying on?

One other question he asked — of the deputy sheriff: Who reported having seen Ben coming away from Sanford's house on the evening of the outrage?

At four o'clock he stopped to speak to certain urchins playing duck-on-a-rock in a field.

"Any rats runnin' around? Jest common rats?"

An abundance was reported.

"The fust feller to fetch me a rat in a cage gits a quarter," he said.

Scattergood ate his dinner placidly, and on his way to his room stopped at the desk.

"Jim," he said to the proprietor, "the's some fellers comin' in tonight with the idee of sellin' me hosses. I'm goin' upstairs. When they come you tell 'em to step right up."

"Sure thing, Mr. Baines. Didn't know you dealt in hoss flesh."

"Don't, not 's a rule. But Higgins Bridge hosses is interestin' especial."

He ascended the creaking stairs and seated himself in the rocker before the window of the somewhat dingy but clean and homelike room which he occupied. In twenty minutes Jim Leslie rapped on the door and was admitted. Jim was a young man of thirty, short and stocky and swarthy. Almost on his heels came Peter Banks, somewhat older, gray-eyed, wiry, nervous of movement and inclined to be talkative. Before he was comfortably seated, Ray Welch arrived. Ray was perhaps forty, an ordinary man of neutral tones. All wore their business faces, which were a trifle grim. Horse-dealers' faces.

"Wal," said Scattergood, "here you all be. Um. . . . We was talkin' hosses, wa'n't we?"

"We was," said Jim Leslie.

"Interestin' subject," said Scattergood. "Ye kin derive a heap of knowledge from observin' the reflections a hoss gives off."

"All a hoss ever gives off to me," said Ray Welch, "is work."

"Any of ye ever carry sugar lumps in your pockets?" asked Scattergood.

"What fur?" asked Leslie.

"So's your hosses'll go nuzzlin' ye for 'em."

"Don't want no hoss nuzzlin' me," said Banks.

"I like a hoss that whickers when he hears me a-comin'," said Scattergood.

"I like a hoss that throws his heft in the pull," said Welch.

"Um. . . . I've known 'em to pull more for a word than they would for a gad," said Scattergood. "Uh-huh, as I was sayin', hosses is lookin'-glasses. They reflect the fellers that own 'em."

There came a rap on the door. Scattergood called, "Come in," and Marvin Towne, sheriff of Coldriver County, entered.

"I'm a-lookin' for Mr. Baines," he said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Here I be," said Scattergood. "What's wanted, Marvin? If 'tain't pressin', jest set. I'm dickerin'."

"No hurry," said the sheriff; "dicker ahead."

"Most folks looks at a hoss's teeth," said Scattergood. "I do. Um. . . . Speakin' of teeth, you got a perty good set yourself, Welch."

Ray Welch grinned sourly. "Ought to have," he said. "They cost me thutty dollars."

"They hain't false!" exclaimed Scattergood.

"Upper 'n' lower," said Mr. Welch.

"A body'd never dream it." Scattergood bent and reached under the bed. "Ketched me a rat this afternoon," he said, producing a wire trap in which a great old barn rodent scurried to and fro.

"Too bad we hain't got a ferret," said Leslie.

"Keepin' him for a pet?" asked Marvin Towne.

"No," said Scattergood; "but it kind of goes ag'in' me to kill any kind of critter. I wisht some of you boys 'ud do it fur me." He looked up expectantly.

Welch stood up. "Don't need no ferrets nor no tikes," he said.

He picked up the cage in his hands, and Scattergood noted how they whitened at the knuckles; he saw how the man's face changed and was no longer neuter: the eyes glittered, the nostrils seemed pinched, the upper lip curled. Welch opened the door of the trap and shook the rat out of its prison. It dropped squealing to the floor; but before it could right itself and scurry to safety, Welch set his heel upon its back. He did not stamp; he was deliberate. For an instant he held the creature under his boot, and then, slowly, gloatingly, he pivoted.

"Welch," said Scattergood, "your hosses got wild-eyed when you got clost, and throwed up their heads. They was scairt of ye, Welch. Them hosses had been abused."

"None of your business," said Welch, still quivering. "I aim to have an animal do what I tell it to."

"This was more'n that. They wa'n't the hosses of a severe man; they was the hosses of a cruel man."

Welch stood scowling, but uncertain in his mind. He did not see what Scattergood was getting at.

"You doted on killin' that rat," said Scattergood. "Most folks shrink from sich things. Now, 'twan't the usual man could 'a' put the pliers to Ol' Man Sanford's knuckles. That feller had to have a bent."

"I calc'late Ben Martin had a bent, all right," said Welch.

"Um. . . . Lemme see; it was you told Sanford he was carryin' on with Susan Briggs, wa'n't it?"

"What of it?"

"Oh, nothin' special," said Scattergood. "And it was you seen him a-comin' away from Sanford's house, the night of the robbery."

"I seen him all right."

"He says," said Scattergood, "it was you advised him to go ask the old man to give him another chance."

"I done so," said Welch. "Kind of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sorry to see the young feller lose his job."

"Um. . . . Mandy asked Ben Martin to kill a pullet. He couldn't do it. He turned sick, and had to give it up."

Welch shrugged his shoulders and sneered.

"Ye hear about these here laboratories," said Scattergood, "where folks makes experiments. Wal, I been a-runnin' a kind of a laboratory, as ye might say. Now, ye take some kind of a drug, and ye experiment around, and test this here attribute and that there attribute, and then ye know what it'll do and what it won't do. Ye know what it kin do and what it can't. I been a-testin' folks instid of drugs. Um. . . . It was a feller with false teeth wrenched up Sanford's fingers. I tested that in this here laboratory of mine, too. This here miscreant took out his teeth, to kind of disguise his voice and make it mushy, so as Sanford wouldn't recognize it."

Welch was very still now; his eyes narrowed as he peered at Scattergood.

"Now, let's kind of check up. Fust, ye had a grudge ag'in' Ben on account of Susan. That's one. Next, ye told Sanford they was carryin' on. That's two. Then ye told Ben to go see the ol' man. That's three, and kind of important-like. Ye knowed Ben was a-goin' there — planned it, as ye might say. And ye reported seein' him. Um. . . . If ye see him ye must 'a' been thereabouts. I know the' was a man with false teeth there, and you got false teeth. That's a p'int. I know the banks wouldn't give ye three thousand dollars on a mortgage on your farm — and ye needed that money perty bad. But all of them things might not 'a' counted ag'in' ye if ye hadn't been the kind of a feller that could do torture and enj'y it. . . . So I calc'late you better put it on the table, Welch."

"Put what on the table?"

"Sanford's thutty-eight hundred dollars."

"I hain't got it. I never had it."

"Ye got it right in your pants," said Scattergood. "I figgered that out in the laboratory, too. Ye hain't the hidin' kind. Ye couldn't trust no hidin' place but ye got a sight of confidence in yourself. I calc'late that there bulge is it. . . . See if 'tain't, Sheriff."

Welch made a sudden menacing movement, but Marvin Towne was efficient in such matters. The movement was never completed. Handcuffs clicked.

"Investigate that there bulge, Marvin," said Scattergood.

The sheriff tossed a thick wallet upon the table.

Scattergood turned to the other two men. "I calc'late that ends the hoss tradin' fur tonight," he said. "Um. . . . It had to be one of the three of ye. . . . G'-bye."

An hour later, Scattergood was driving toward Coldriver with Susan Briggs on the seat beside him.

"I calc'late," he said, "you'll want to give Ben the results of these here chemical analyzin's of ourn!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Every once in a while your Editor finds himself the victim of his own miscalculating. Here, let us say, is a new issue of EQMM, all ready to go to press — and it is a full story short! S. O. S. — Save Our Sleuths! What added story can we put our fingers on at a moment's notice? Inventory, memory, notes — front and center! Oh, no — not just any *story! It isn't merely a matter of the correct length, merely a matter of filling pages! First we must analyze the contents we now have, and then decide what type of story will offer the best contrast, the most diversification, the finest balance . . .*

Often it gets down to something like this: we need a story of precisely so-many pages, preferably by a well-known English writer, of straight detection rather than of crime, and if possible, a tale which has never before been published in the United States. And it is surprising how often, in this particular set of circumstances, we solve the problem by going back into the work of Edgar Wallace; for there are still stories by that prolific practitioner which are new even to his most rabid followers — if only you have the "unknown" books to draw from.

Edgar Wallace, as we have said before and as we shall keep on saying, is a much misunderstood writer. Almost invariably he is referred to as a concocter of thrillers. In a measure, that was true; but it is even truer, in a critical sense, to realize that Edgar Wallace had a deeper sense of characterization than of action; that he could write a quiet scene more effectively than a scene of violence and gunplay; that in his best work he wrote with premeditated indirection instead of potboiling obviousness; and that in so many of Edgar Wallace's short stories there was always the germ of a big idea.

You will find that germ in "The Great Bank Fraud" — an extremely ingenious conception that Edgar Wallace casually used for a short tale; another writer might easily have made it the springboard of a full-length novel . . .

THE GREAT BANK FRAUD

by EDGAR WALLACE

THE Orator knew the London & Southern Bank, because what little money he possessed was in its safe keeping. He knew Mr. Baide, the general manager of the Piccadilly Branch, by sight, because Inspector Rater once occupied a very cheap apartment in St. James's Street, the

From The Orator *by Edgar Wallace. Reprinted by permission*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

owner of the flat making a special concession in the matter of rent, being under the impression that the presence of a detective officer of such high standing upon the premises would act as a scarecrow to possible burglars.

And, sitting at his window smoking his morning pipe, the Orator often saw Mr. Baide walking slowly up St. James's Street towards Piccadilly, his tall hat on the back of his head, his overcoat open summer and winter, his hands clasping behind him a furled umbrella, and on his placid face that peculiar expression of blankness which so often distinguishes the profound thinker.

As for Sir Isaac Mannheim, the President of the London & Southern, who did not know him? His great-grandfather had been born in Germany and had emigrated to England as a youth. But the Mannheims had remained German in name, whatever British characteristics they might have acquired, and most curtly did Sir Isaac refuse to change his name either on the outbreak or at the conclusion of war.

"It was good enough for my father and it is good enough for me," he said.

He served through the war with distinction, gained the D.S.O. and lost his left arm, and came back to a world so bitterly anti-German that he might have been excused if he had yielded to the entreaties of his fellow directors. He listened in silence, grinned unpleasantly, and then:

"Give me back my left arm and I'll think about changing my name," he said.

He was an autocrat of autocrats; the directors of the bank were the merest ciphers — were in reality his nominees. Yet such was his genius that he raised the London & Southern to the highest position in the City of London, and, rejecting all offers of absorption, came out in the end the only formidable rival to the Big Six.

He was a good sportsman, a very gallant fellow, a rider to hounds, and the adored head of his family. Here appears and disappears Sir Isaac Mannheim from the story of the great check fraud.

The Orator had met him once and had been impressed. Later he was to be extremely annoyed with this perspicacious gentleman.

It was a curious coincidence that at the time Inspector Rater was called in by the London & Southern Bank he was engaged in investigating the affairs of Mr. Joseph Purdew, some time of Dartmoor Prison, ex-convict, ex-confidence man, ex-fraudulent promoter. Mr. Rater was interested to discover how many of those "ex's" were honorary titles, and seemingly they all came into this category, for Joe Purdew was indubitably well established, with an office in a fashionable West End thoroughfare, as a bookmaker and commission agent, and the one glance Inspector Rater threw round the office convinced him that, whatever the graft might be, it was lucrative.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When he was ushered into the holy of holies, where Joe Purdew sat at an empire desk chewing a gold toothpick, it occurred to the visitor for one fleeting moment that Joe was not too happy to see him. The synthetic heartiness of the greeting would not have deceived a child.

"Why, fancy meeting you, Mr. Rater! Come in, come in. Have a glass of wine with me."

Joe was stout and purple, and fussed round the room like an old hen, carefully closing the polished mahogany door which separated him from secular companionship.

"It's a funny thing, I meant to write to you the other day."

"What's the swindle?" asked Rater, shaking his head at the invitation to wine.

Joe beamed.

"No swindle, Mr. Rater — I'm running a straight business. I've got four hundred of the best people in London on my books — profits nearly a thousand a week. Mugs, I agree, but mug-catching isn't a crime, thank Gawd!"

He traded in the name of "Bull & England," which had a patriotic flavor to it.

"Everything's straight and aboveboard, Mr. Rater. I've finished with the old game," said Joe virtuously. "What I like is to be able to sit down in my house in Bayswater without the fear of a busy coming in and tapping me on the shoulder and asking me to step round and see the sergeant. Remember that time you pinched me at Southampton? But, Lord, I bear no malice. . . ."

Mr. Rater had no special reason for calling. He had heard of Joe's newest occupation, and had dropped in to satisfy his curiosity.

As he pulled the door of the outer office open he nearly collided with a lady who was standing on the mat. She was tall and imposing; her hair was a deep auburn, and whatever defects there might have been in her complexion had been artificially rectified. She had good features, rather fine, lightish-gray eyes, and as she was expensively dressed he supposed that she was one of those four hundred best people in London of whom Joe had boasted.

The second impression, which arrived immediately on top of the other, was that he had met her before. Memory plays tricks; in some obscure fashion she was associated in his mind with a broken pane of glass.

He stepped aside, and she passed him majestically.

He had returned to Scotland Yard when the first report of the London & Southern Bank fraud was brought to him. The account covered two pages of foolscap and contained surprisingly little information. The plain fact was that a check drawn for £35,000 had been presented and honored, and that the signature was afterwards discovered to be a forgery.

Mr. Baide came into the outer office to meet the visitor. He was tall and stout and worried-looking, his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gray hair untidy, his weary eyes eloquent of a sleepless night.

The Piccadilly branch of the London & Southern Bank had been recently rebuilt. The bank premises were the last word in luxurious dignity, and Inspector Rater, whose architectural tastes ran in the direction of domed roofs and serpentine marble, had a sense of contentment.

Mr. Baide led him to his private office, carefully closed the door, and pulled up a chair to the desk.

"It is a most terrible business," he said. "I have never before had such a thing happen — never! For thirty-five years I have been a servant of the bank, and never once has a forgery come my way."

"You're lucky," said the Orator.

He was not interested in the manager's biography. He wanted to hear only of a certain check for £35,000 which had been presented by somebody who had never been seen, honored by an unknown cashier, the transaction entered up by a mysterious clerk.

"The first intimation I had that anything was wrong was when Mr. Gillan's secretary came to me with the pass-book and told me that there was no record of a sum of £35,000 being withdrawn. The record we have — and it is entered in a strange hand — is this."

He opened a large loose-leaf ledger and pointed to a line:

Bearer check £35,000.

"The check we found — it had by mistake been filed under another name, 'Gilby.' It is unmistakably a forgery. Here it is."

He handed a slip of paper to the detective, who looked at it, smelled it, held it up to the light, and finally laid it on the table before him.

"Is this from one of Mr. Gillan's check books?" he asked. "You keep a record of the check books which you issue?"

The manager nodded.

"Yes; it was the last check but one in a book which was issued to Mr. Gillan a month ago. We are in the habit of sending him ten books, each containing a hundred blank checks, every six months. Mr. Gillan is a very rich stockbroker, who lives in Grosvenor Square, and this is not only his private, but to some extent his business, account."

The Orator examined the check again. It had been privately printed, and the words "Thomas L. Gillan Account" were inserted in small letters above the name of the bank. It was, he observed, countersigned in the bottom left-hand corner with the initials "C. E."

"Who is 'C. E.'?" he asked.

Mr. Baide smiled wanly.

"Nobody," he said. "That is a code which means thirty-five thousand. When Mr. Gillan signs a check for a thousand pounds or more he indicates the fact by these initials. The 'C' stands for '3,' the 'E' for '5.' If it were for one thousand pounds it would be 'A.'"

"Who knows about this code?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

asked the Orator. "You, of course. But who else?"

The manager half shook his head.

"It was a matter entirely between Mr. Gillan and myself. All big checks have to come to me for verification, and — that is the curious thing — this check was *not* brought to me. My secretary was only remarking this morning that I must have detected the fraud ——"

"Who is your secretary?"

"You had better see her."

Mr. Baide pressed a bell; a few seconds later the glass door opened and into the Orator's life came Miss Helen Lyne.

She was little above medium height, but her slimness gave the impression that she was taller. She was rather pretty in an enigmatic way; her hair was dark and brushed back from her forehead; the horn-rimmed glasses she wore were probably an improvement to her appearance. He guessed her to be somewhere in the region of twenty-four. She looked, and he learned afterwards that she was, very capable; she was at any rate immensely self-possessed. She met the detective's eyes without flinching.

"This is Miss Lyne," said the manager.

Rater nodded.

"Do you know about the code?" *he asked abruptly.*

For a second her straight eyebrows met in a frown of bewilderment. Then her face cleared.

"Oh, you mean the code on Mr. Gillan's checks — yes."

Mr. Baide's mouth opened in astonishment.

"But I never told you!" he blurted.

Her red lips curved in a smile.

"No, but it was very obvious. I've seen so many of Mr. Gillan's checks and I've noticed that the countersignature varies, so I guessed it was a code."

"The check was not brought into this office while Mr. Baide was out?"

She shook her head.

"No, I've never seen it before."

He asked her one or two questions, and all the time her eyes were fixed on his. There was the ghost of amusement in them once, he thought, and was piqued. Eventually he dismissed her, waited till the door was closed, then walked slowly towards it and opened it quickly. She was nowhere in sight.

"Where did you find this girl?" he asked.

Mr. Baide fetched a long sigh.

"She is very capable, but I can't get on with her," he said. "She was sent to me from the head office about six months ago. I've no complaints against her: she is most industrious and often she'll work here for an hour after I've left, checking up correspondence."

"Where do you keep your keys?"

Baide led him to a wall safe.

"Here," he said, and showed, hanging on steel pegs, about twenty keys great and small.

"What are those?" asked the Orator, and the manager explained.

The majority were pass-keys. That

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one was the main office safe, and that the strong-room, another was a pass-key to all the upstair offices.

"Miss Lyne ever go to this safe?"

The other hesitated.

"Yes, I think she's been once or twice, but I trust her, naturally; she was sent to me from the head office by Sir Isaac himself. Sir Isaac never makes a mistake."

"Sir Isaac Mannheim? Where is he now?"

Again the manager sighed.

"He's on his yacht, cruising in the Mediterranean. We've been trying to get in touch with him, but we haven't succeeded so far."

Later the Orator interviewed the assistant manager, the chief accountant, and the head cashier. Until late in the afternoon he was in possession of Mr. Baide's office, questioning and cross-questioning clerks and tellers, and in the end was as wise as he had been when he had read the first report.

Before he left he sent for Baide, who had taken up his quarters in the assistant manager's office.

"Obviously, this job has been done from inside the office, by somebody who has access to the books and therefore to your safe," he said.

Mr. Baide waited expectantly; if he imagined that the Orator would give him an account of his conclusions he was disappointed. Mr. Rater went back to headquarters and, interviewing his chief, discussed very briefly what he had learned.

"Gillan, was it?" The Chief Constable scratched his nose thoughtfully. "That's funny! Gillan was supposed to have been killed the day after that check was presented — there was an airplane smash in Kent, and you remember his name was among the casualties. Apparently it was another man with very nearly the same name."

The Orator stared at him thoughtfully but said nothing.

The next morning he arrived at the bank, to learn that Mr. Baide had not put in an appearance: he was suffering from a nervous breakdown and was apparently in a bad way.

"You'll tell me what I wish to know," said the Orator to the assistant manager. "I want a list of all your customers that have died in the last twelve months and ——"

He heard an exclamation behind him and turned quickly. Miss Lyne had come noiselessly into the room and she was staring at him in wonder. And then she said a thing for which the Orator never completely forgave her.

"How very clever of you!" she said.

He was still gasping at this piece of impertinence on the girl's part when a clerk came into the room.

"Will you see Mrs. Luben-Kellner?" he asked of the assistant manager.

The name was familiar to the Orator, and then he remembered: Mrs. Luben-Kellner was a racehorse owner and something of a figure in the sporting world, not by reason of her horses' victories, which were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

few and far between, but by reason of their mediocrity. She had the reputation of having the worst stable of horses in England, and they had apparently been acquired at some expense. Perhaps their bad qualities were due to the fact that she herself trained them. She was the only woman trainer in England, and was rather jealous of that reputation.

The assistant manager looked a little dubiously at the Orator.

"I'd better see this lady."

"Do you want the room?"

"No. It won't be very private, if you don't mind her being shown in here?"

Mr. Rater shook his head. He never objected to meeting people.

When the door opened, there came into the room, bringing with her the fragrance of an exotic perfume, the lady he had seen on the door-mat of Joe Purdew's office. The recognition was mutual; she shot one quick glance at the detective, and when she spoke her voice was a little husky.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, mister, but — where's Mr. Baide?"

"He's not very well today, madam," said the assistant manager, "but I can fix anything you want."

Again she looked at the detective, and was obviously at a loss as to how she should proceed.

"I'd rather discuss this matter without strangers being present," she said. Her voice was shrill, common; whatever veneer of refinement there was was scratched away in her agitation.

There was nothing for the Orator to do but to leave the room. He was puzzled. Again he had that flashing recollection of a pane of broken glass.

The assistant manager came out after a while, went into Baide's office, and returned again to his visitor. Inspector Rater waited till the woman was gone, then the assistant manager came out of his room and beckoned him.

"Who is she?" asked Mr. Rater.

The official shrugged. He didn't know very much, except that she was a lady with a large income. More than this he would not tell. Banks are not frank about their customers — especially to detective officers.

"As a matter of fact, she didn't come on business. She said she left a notebook in Mr. Baide's office — she came to see him yesterday."

While he had been waiting for the lady to go, the Orator had located the office of the secretary. He had a few inquiries to make of her, but the result of his questioning had not, so far, been at all satisfactory. On his way out he stopped at the door of her office, turned the handle and stepped in. She was sitting at a typewriter desk, and so quietly had he entered that she did not realize he was there until he spoke, and then she closed a little notebook she was reading, so hurriedly that he guessed he had interrupted an important study.

"Why clever?" he said.

She swung round in her swivel chair so that she faced and looked up to him, and again he saw that mocking

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

smile and the twitching at the corners of the red lips.

"I thought it was awfully clever of you! You're Mr. Rater, aren't you?"

He nodded.

"Somebody told me that you never spoke, but you've made quite a lot of speeches since you've been here, haven't you?"

For some reason Mr. Rater found himself going red. He was more furious with himself than with her.

"Young lady," he said, gently, "two people ever tried to pull my leg, and only one of them escaped the gallows!"

Her amusement was undisguised now.

"Then I'm afraid I'm in for a nasty time!" she said. "I'm sorry, Mr. Rater. I was only joking. But I do think it was clever of you to remember that when a person dies there is less likely to be a fuss about his forged check than if he's alive to repudiate it. And almost everybody thought Mr. Gillan was dead, didn't they? And here he is, alive and well and raising hell, if you'll forgive the unladylike expression."

The Orator regarded her soberly.

"How clever of you!" he said. "You know so much that I'm in three minds to take you along to Cannon Row or maybe to Scotland Yard, and have a real tea-table talk with you."

She shook her head.

"You'd be wasting your time, O Orator! But I can quite understand your point of view. I'll show you something."

She opened the bottom drawer of her little desk and took out a small new diary. It was the sort of thing that could be purchased for a shilling. She turned the leaves rapidly, and held up an open page to him. It was covered with neat figures, and the Orator noticed that the last was £35,000.

"That is what Mrs. Kellner came for, and I said I hadn't seen it!"

The Orator took the book from her and slipped it into his pocket.

"Interesting," said Mr. Rater. "Now I'd like to hand you a few startling facts, young lady. Do you know Joe Purdew?"

To his surprise she nodded.

"Snide bookmaker, isn't he?"

"Very snide," she answered, soberly.

"Mean fellow, too? There's a girl goes there and sees him every evening. Her hair isn't straight like yours, and she doesn't wear horn-rimmed spectacles."

"She may when she is inside," said the girl, quietly. "She really is quite short-sighted."

"But she doesn't wear her hair like you."

Miss Lyne shook her head.

"And she doesn't call herself Miss Lyne. Miss Larner, as far as I can remember."

The smile came back to her face slowly.

"You *are* clever!" she said, with obvious admiration.

"Nothing clever about spotting you. Now, young lady, perhaps you'll

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tell me all about the why and wherefore of your evening calls on my crooked friend."

The smile left her face. She thought for a moment, and then:

"Accountancy. I'm the young lady who does the books. He gets me cheaply, and he's given up his desire to make love to me — that was a nuisance at first."

"Who put you in this office?" interrupted the Orator.

"This bank office? — Sir Isaac," she replied.

The Orator scratched his chin. The answer seemed sufficient.

"Mrs. Kellner is a customer of Joe's?"

She nodded.

"The best customer he has," she said drily.

"Can't understand her, and can't understand myself," he mused. "Whenever I see that woman I think of a bit of broken glass ——"

"A picture-frame?" she suggested, and the Orator jumped. He reached out his hand and gripped hers warmly.

"Where does she live?"

"At Pentley, in Berkshire, if you want to find her."

"Married?"

The girl nodded.

"She's almost straight," she said, seriously. "Only she's got this peculiar vanity about horses — she thinks she understands them. I have an idea she must be the victim of her first husband. Have you ever seen her second husband come to town? He arrives in a swagger motor-car and invariably gets out near the Guards Memorial in Green Park and makes the rest of the journey on foot ——"

The Orator waved her to silence. It was not a moment when he wanted anybody to crow over him, and this girl was unmistakably crowing.

An hour and a quarter from town is a tiny village that nestles at the foot of the Berkshire hills. On the crest, and within sight of the beautiful downs, is a large red house that stands in ten acres of ground. The Orator did not drive up to the front door; he left his car at some distance from the house, and, like the second husband of Mrs. Kellner, went afoot. Nor, after his long walk through the grounds, did he approach the house directly until he saw that the big front doors were wide open. Nor did he ring: he stepped into the spacious hall and listened.

The sound of voices that he heard came from a room beyond the stairway, and, with no thought or worry as to what would happen if he were discovered by a servant, he stepped softly forward and listened. . . .

Mrs. Luben-Kellner could be very coarse. She was being very coarse now.

". . . skulking here, when you ought to be up and doing and showing your face. What do you think that 'busy' will think? . . . You know what a busy is," she said, impatiently, in answer to a mumbled inquiry. "You're going to bring me to ruin, that's what you're going to do. Fancy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

leavin' that book at the office for everybody to read! And Mr. Purdew says that he'll be brought into it too."

A groan of a voice, indistinct and indecipherable. Then the woman's shrill voice rose again.

"You'll be all right if you do as Joe — Mr. Purdew tells you. Go back to the office tomorrow. Nobody knows, nobody'll ever dream it's you ——"

It was at this point that the Orator opened the door. Mr. Baide sat hunched up in a big deep chair, his elbows on his knees, his big hands covering his face.

"Why did I do it? Why did I ever do it?" he asked, wildly. "You've been a bad wife to me. I've been entirely dominated by you. I hate horses, I hate horse-racing. . . . Oh, God! I wish I'd never seen you! I wish I could get rid of you!"

"I can help you there," said the Orator.

Baide leapt to his feet, his face the color of chalk.

"I'm terribly sorry you thought I was rude to you," said Miss Lyne, penitently. "But then, you must remember, Mr. Rater, that I regard you as an interloper. Dobell's Detective Agency has been on this case for two years. Harry Dobell is my brother. He sent me six months ago to get all the facts. You see, Sir Isaac has been suspicious for a long time. Whenever a customer of the bank died suddenly, the executors invariably had a dispute about some check that had been drawn a day before the death. I think that was Joe's idea — he's an old friend of yours, isn't he? The moment he heard that a customer with a big account had died, a check was prepared and passed through the account by poor old Baide. Sometimes no questions were asked; the executors did not attempt to trace the money, and the thing might never have been discovered so completely but for the report of Gillan's death. The unbelievable thing is that Mrs. Joe did all her betting with her first husband — and really expected to be paid if she won!"

The Orator ran his fingers through his hair and smiled irritably.

"What a fool I was not to remember that I'd seen her portrait in Joe's baggage the last time I pinched him!"

"Nobody will ever know how poor Mr. Baide fell into their clutches." She shook her head sadly.

"Such a nice old gentleman! What are you going to charge Mrs. Kellner with?"

"Bigamy," said the Orator, "and conspiracy."

The girl shook her head.

"It's a pity; she's been punished enough. You don't realize that, because Joe never made love to you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We are deeply indebted to one of EQMM's "most assiduous" readers for both the selection and the text of the story which follows. The reader is Paul Kitchen of Bayonne, New Jersey, and we must confess that when Mr. Kitchen called our attention to Morley Roberts's "Mithridates the King," he introduced us to a tale we had never even heard of. And we are most grateful — for we should not have wanted to miss this unusual story.

The only work by Morley Roberts with which we were familiar was a short story called "The Anticipator," reprinted in one of Dorothy L. Sayers's anthologies. "The Anticipator" is that type of story which, once read, remains forever in the memory. It was included in the author's scarce and relatively unknown book, THE GRINDER'S WHEEL *(1907), which Christopher Morley once described as "treasure trove."*

Morley Roberts, whose name is seldom come upon these forgetful days, died in 1942 at the age of eighty-five. His first book was published in 1887, and his last in 1941 — fifty-four years of creative effort. During this remarkable span Mr. Roberts wrote more than fifty books, an average of one per year, touching nearly every form of literary expression — the novel, the short story, drama, biography, and in the latter part of his life, treatises on world politics. He was a personal friend of Joseph Conrad, W. H. Hudson, and Conan Doyle, and his favorite hobbies were chess and fishing.

We have already described "Mithridates the King" as an unusual story. Actually, it is much more than that. The only correct epithet is that much abused term "unique." But let us quote Mr. Kitchen, the true discoverer of the tale: "The idea, the crux, of this story is certainly one that I do not remember having read elsewhere, although it is quite simple and obvious after *you know it . . . Still, Roberts handles the idea very amusingly, and in addition achieves 'that resolution of climax' to which you referred in the rubric to Vincent Cornier's 'The Stone Ear.' But in his story Roberts goes Cornier two better — in withholding the explanation of the mystery until the ultimate word. Cornier's solution was actually in three words, and these words were employed earlier in the story, and not altogether unimplied. Roberts reserves his solution for the very last single word, and it is the only appearance of that particular word (or meaning) in the story!"*

With all of which your Editor heartily concurs.

Mr. Kitchen goes on: "I presume you will devise a new title; the present one strikes me as being less felicitous than obscure."

No, there we disagree with Mr. Kitchen. We don't think we can improve on Morley Roberts's own title. We do agree that the original title is not par-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ADAPTED FOR MODERN READER TASTE

ticularly attractive, and is certainly obscure. But the meaning of the old pharmaceutical term, mithridate, is completely relevant, and while the application to Mithridates the King is not perfect, it is in the spirit of the basic plot device. But don't look up either mithridate or Mithridates in your dictionary or encyclopedia until after *you have read Mr. Roberts's undeservedly "lost" story.*

MITHRIDATES THE KING

by MORLEY ROBERTS

THE War Office is on the left side of Pall Mall as you go West, and it is a compound, complex, intricate, protoplasmic mass of amorphous rooms, passages, and cells, in which it is easy for a man, or an improvement, or a project to get so thoroughly lost that he or it is never heard of again. There are rooms in it with bookcases of fine old books, well worth any man's stealing; there are others with human fossils, admirably adapted for exhibition, though no one would think of stealing them; there are a good many clever men there spoiled for life; there are some not quite spoiled; there are a few absolutely worth any man's money as workers, for even the Civil Service cannot always destroy natural energy. And of these Hetherwick Coutts, of A. G. 15, was one. In the eyes of his superiors he was invaluable. To his inferiors he was a beast, and they hated him unanimously, and said so without the slightest reserve — when he was on leave or out of the room.

To reach the Department known technically as A. G. 15, you go in the first door you come to next to the Reform Club, and then turn to the right. After going a few hundred yards or so, past a few score doors, taking care not to tumble over boxes of papers which are humorously described as "on transit," because no one knows where they are, there is a stone staircase. Here it is best to call a messenger and fee him. After a long and weary journey the traveler reaches a black passage like the entrance to a catacomb, and probably ruins his hat against an unlighted gas-jet. Opening a door, he stumbles into A. G. 15, and almost on the occupants thereof, who are usually six in number.

Hetherwick Coutts sat in the second room with a subordinate, whom a long course of previous military service in a low grade had rendered proof to any superior's bad temper, unless that superior took to kicking him. And it is only just to Coutts to say he never did that, nor even constructively threw things at his subordinates. A constructive shying is to throw papers on the floor and request the harmless gentleman who has brought them to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pick them up again. It is an unpleasant way of making objections, and in any but Her Majesty's employ might give rise to actions for assault and battery. However, Hetherwick Coutts was not so gross as all that. He dressed well, and tried to live up to his tailor at any rate. His forte was sarcasm, and a kind of military insolence he had picked up from one or two Staff officers, who had been relegated to the purlieus of the W. O. as Deputy-Assistant-something-or-others because they were a deal too smart to live with their regiments.

For it is very easy to learn to sneer in a big office. There is sure to be one fool at least in the room, and if he is too irascible, or too much of a fighting man to go for verbally, there are times when he retires upstairs to have a smoke. Then the others can stand before the fire and say what they think without any danger of a row, which may end in the real slinging of ink or of the sacred Bible of the W. O., which is bound in pinkish paper. In some departments of the Foreign Office they fight with illuminated addresses to Her Majesty, in which our noble Queen is congratulated on her birthday or some other event, for very few ever reach Windsor, in spite of the lying letters which acknowledge them. But in Pall Mall most larking or rowing is done with Army Lists, or candles, or both. But this is a digression, though not without its uses, because Hetherwick Coutts was brought up in the office from his early youth.

How he was hated! — for he was not a fool, and had a prodigious memory.

"There was a paper on this subject about ten years ago," he would remark easily, and the whole dusty Registry cursed him when that paper was called for.

"You made exactly the same mistake before, Mr. Smith, so you are not even original."

And he would recall Mr. Smith's folly with exact persistence into ancient detail very sickening to a man who was always careful.

Then he descended to absurd particulars. A wretched writer at tenpence an hour was not to cross his t's in such a way unless he wished to look for another office. He was mean too, and more than once made a mistake on purpose to catch a clerk for not detecting it. Sometimes he had to sign a number of papers and put "No remarks" on them.

"If I were called upon to report on the intelligence of those who help me," he remarked brightly, "I should require a new supply of minute paper."

He always cut his subordinates if he met them in the street, which of course greatly endeared him to them. If they had only known that the D. A. A. G. had cut him in the Row, it would have poured balsam into their wounds, and made them work cheerfully for a whole week. Sometimes when a man asked him a question he snorted; he snorted some clean out of the room. The messengers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loathed him. The orderlies wanted to catch him in the dark and cut his entrails out with their belts. The waiter who brought him his dinner, or rather his lunch, thought of poisoning him.

There were others besides the waiter who had notions it would be the best thing that could happen if Hetherwick Coutts would take up his abode in the next world and run A. G. 15 in Dante's nethermost Inferno, with Satan for the Field Marshal Commanding-in-chief; for a man's subordinates usually hate him if there is any chance of their obtaining an increase in their monthly checks when he deceases; and the higher men get, the more their greedy ambition is roused. This is the curse of the Civil Service. Hidden in the backroom of a dingy building, their doings are nothing to the world. Their only ambition centres on a petty power and a fuller purse. And if you would hate the man next above you at any time and in any place, how much more — O poor Obscurity — will you abhor him when he bars the way to you, and is neither old, nor an idiot, and has robust and indecent health. The only hope the men below had was that he would die of apoplexy. He had a red, healthy face, and they tried to think it a good sign — for them; for there were two of them who both hoped to be made chief when Hetherwick Coutts went below. They hated each other, but their hate for him was a crescent disease: though it seemed to reach the full, it still encroached.

F. W. Palmer, or Frederick Wentworth Palmer, was the man with the best chance according to official routine, for he was slightly the senior in service of Lyall Burke. But Burke was the cleverer man of the two, and had the neater knack of nice obsequiousness. Coutts was rather better disposed towards Burke than to most of the men about him. He had been distinctly civil to him several times, and Burke wondered why, expecting the deluge some day.

The rank obscurity of the paths that foiled ambition and baffled desire will lead men into, has had many a detective's bull's-eye thrust into it, but for all that, one can't survey jungle or mallee scrub by the fiercest storm of thunder and lightning. Given severity of purpose, a man must act some way or another. He may wait and wait, but at last he grows tired of sharpening his razor in vain. He must shave someone. According to his disposition his thoughts grow; from them bud the flower of design and the fruit of deed. In a wider life, we may dissipate our civil energies; but in a narrow groove, anger, hatred, and all uncharitableness do more than blossom. If a man harms us without knowing it, we may grin and endure, and hold our peace, and sharpen no knives; but when he hates us, and we him, the devil is in the imbroglio, and all the hideous contents of the witches' pot will strengthen the incantation we mutter.

For this man set thorns in his subordinates' path; he grew inhuman,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bestial. They loathed their own forced civility; under their smooth tongues lurked malice. Their own jealousy and distrust were nothing when they thought of him. Warm feelings simulating comradeship thrilled them when they spoke subtly against him. They estimated his life-forces: how long should he live? They canvassed every change he showed: the marks of a later night than most sent up their hopes. When he was really unwell, his slackened pulses set theirs galloping; as he failed, they grew stronger; when he went on leave, they turned on each other. And then the beast came back so strong, so hearty, so healthy that they almost sickened. They congratulated him palely, like two curs; and, more cur-like still, they made two homes like hell that night.

Who put it in their hearts, who instructed them, who gave them the unnatural courage to even think of his death otherwise than they had done? The seeds of all crimes are in all hearts, as the seeds of all high virtues, all noble desires. Crush a man, he may not turn; he lacks sufficient courage; but at last he will. These two men, independently of each other, determined to rid themselves of Hetherwick Coutts. They would kill him. And naturally enough they turned to poison. They studied in secret.

Meanwhile, Hetherwick Coutts behaved like a rampant housekeeper who, after keeping her bed, gets up to discover flue and dirt in every hole and corner in the house. This was wrong, and that was wrong; and why was it that when his back was turned everything went wrong? He licked the skin off everyone, and rubbed caustic into their wounds with great delight in seeing them squirm: he used one hemisphere of his big brain to do his work with, the other he employed to invent sarcasms. For two weeks he thoroughly enjoyed himself, and he was getting into his usual routine when he had worked up both Burke and Palmer to be as good as their bad resolutions.

The next best thing to making up your mind to do a good deed without any slackness, or slowness, or want of utter completion, is to do exactly the reverse, and get on the side of Ahriman without reserve. Not five minutes before I began this particular paragraph I read a letter which accused me of letting my imagination run away with my perceptive faculties. If that is true, I may be wrong in thinking that it must be far beyond any art, or the practice thereof, to have no conscience and no remorse and a passion for poisoning. So I think that the best moment Coutts's two subordinates had in their life of miserable service was when they rose to the occasion and began to act on their real impulses. But the passion that leads to crime is usually like the dawn of a wet day. There is blood, and fire, and strange immortal-looking color in the east, but it dies in gray as the sea turns cold and wind and rain come together to blot out its evil glory.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They were cowards, after all, these men, though they once dared to act: for they did dare.

They poisoned him both on the same day, at the same hour, for some strange sympathy linked them together. The rising heat of one's blood, in the lower plane of man where crimes flourish redly, urged on the other; and when Hetherwick Coutts insulted them together in a tone that was like the hissing of hot metal and ice, with his Celtic and Saxon temperaments laid close in one bitter intention, they retorted vulgarly and in silence, with mixed poisons in his beer. They sat apart at the other end of the room and saw him empty his pint jug. Their blood ran cold, they shook, and whined excuses to their own souls. How sick they felt when he announced at half-past two that he did not feel well and would go home. Their throats were as dry as the fountains of the pit, and they repented for fear, and sweated ice. Before a man commits crimes he should test his courage, and not rush blindly into hell before he knows his endurance of torment.

With the same passion of fear came the same expression to their ghastly faces. They looked at each other stealthily, and ended by fearing each other. "Why did Burke look so?" said Palmer, and Palmer questioned himself equivalently. They went on paltry excuses to each other's desks; they stared at each other out of the corners of their eyes. The avoidance that each felt in the other was confirmation. As the long hours went on, they were confirmed in their mutual suspicions. As the clock struck five, the others went like beasts of burden, glad at unyoking time. They remained and washed their hands as they would have washed their stained memories. Burke communed with himself; he would say he felt uninclined to go home; he would ask Palmer to dine with him. The same thought was in the slower brain of his colleague.

"If you will," said Burke, "come and dine with me tonight at some restaurant. I don't feel inclined to go home."

"Very well," replied Palmer, hoarsely. And Burke felt a little easier. "Would this man dine with him if he thought him what he was; if he had seen?"

So they went out together, and they walked down Pall Mall to Charing Cross.

"Let's go into Gatti's," said Burke, and they sat at the best end of the long restaurant. Both maneuvred to get their faces most in shadow. But there was little for either, and Palmer got what there was.

Burke ordered a good dinner — soup and a *vol-au-vent* and a bird — and suggested champagne. Though he was meaner than Méanness itself, standing a shame to relative things in the realm of Noumena, Palmer was not surprised. And it made his entertainer's heart sink that he was not.

They ate as if they were eating dry crusts in a prison, and looked at each other furtively. They drank as though

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they wanted to swamp hot fires within, and grew a little braver. But for all that, they looked strange, white-livered hounds, and not to be liked. The foolish young men and girls, and the foolish old men with girls by no means foolish in their generation, looked wise and great beside them. As there are different infinities, there are different degradations. To be greatly afraid after a deliberate act is to wallow in the sink of the nethermost pit. They drank on.

Palmer insisted on ordering more wine, for which he was to pay. What would have sent them both into the gutter a week ago was nothing to them now. They were strangely conscious that each drank enormously without getting affected. They turned to liqueur brandy, and their sad and extraordinary sobriety made the waiter respect them. Such dry sticks of men, yet how they could drink! He reported their deeds to the manager, who inspected them to estimate their solvency. At last they went out together and the chill air affected them. They went down the Strand and turned into a wine shop to take a farewell. They affected friendship. Burke grew bold.

"To the devil with old Hetherwick Coutts!" said he.

"Yes," said Palmer, pallid to the gums. His tongue clove to his mouth. Burke looked at him suddenly, and Palmer turned away; his boon companion followed him. They walked up towards Piccadilly in silence.

"I wonder whether he is going home," they said to themselves. "When he gets rid of me he will inform the police," they murmured. They walked into Piccadilly, it was twelve o'clock, half-past twelve, and Walpurgis night. Palmer reeled at the next turning and stumbled a little up the narrow street. It leads to Vine Street; the police station is there at the back of St. James's Hall, that home of music and morals. Burke had a sudden blind access of rage, he struck at Palmer fiercely and smote him on the jaw; the other retorted, and they rolled over, locked together. There was a rush of men and women, and oaths and yells and laughter roared over them as they fought on the pavement.

"Two swells fighting," said one girl, and a policeman pushed her aside. In half a minute they were inside the station, for that policeman had refrained three times in one night from arresting anybody. Even a policeman's temper is not everlasting.

They almost fought again trying to get the first word, and were plucked roughly apart by another constable.

"Well, what's this?" said the night inspector.

"Two drunks fighting, sir," said the policeman.

"He's poisoned a man at the War Office!" screamed Palmer, who in his rage of fear thought to accuse the other of his own crime.

"It is he that did it!" said Burke readily. "I saw him."

"Did what?" said the inspector. "Hold your tongue, sir!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This was to Burke, and as he was fast recovering his cunning and self-control, he bowed.

"Now then, sir, what is this you say?"

"I say that man poisoned Mr. Hetherwick Coutts of the War Office this afternoon. I saw him," said Palmer, reeling, for he was full to the lips.

"And you say that he did it?"

"Yes," said Burke; "I saw him."

The inspector shrugged his shoulders and looked at them curiously. He turned to a sergeant, for he had only just come on duty.

"There is no talk of anything at the War Office?" he said.

"Not that I know of," said the sergeant stiffly.

"Then I think that we had better accommodate these two gentlemen for the night; for if they have poisoned no one else, they have been poisoning themselves," said the inspector.

They were marched off and put in the cells.

"This is a rather queer thing, is it not, Bowes?" remarked the inspector, leaving his seat and warming himself at the fire.

"Yes, sir," said the laconic sergeant.

"Do you think there is anything in it?" The inspector could not refrain from asking the question, for it certainly seemed very curious.

"Drink, sir!" replied Bowes.

"Early tomorrow send down to the War Office and inquire about this man, this Mr. Hetherwick Coutts."

And in the morning they did so. At eleven o'clock Mr. Hetherwick Coutts was in his usual place, and in answer to the inquiries as to his health, he replied that he was well enough, though he had felt very ill during the previous afternoon and evening. At the inquiry Palmer and Burke held their peace, and knew nothing.

"Yet I gave him enough atropine to have killed two men," said Palmer to himself.

"Yet I gave him enough muscarine to have killed a donkey," said Burke.

But these two poisons are antidotes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

KICK

by HUGH MacNAIR KAHLER

A good deed every day, huh?" said Louie.

"Yeh, a good deed every day," said Big Joe. "You gotta do it, the kid says."

Louie took time to think it over. He pulled his head, turtle-fashion, deeper down into the collar of the fur benny. It was a cold night and the speed of the open bus didn't make it any warmer.

"For nothing, huh?"

"Yeh, for nothing," said Joe. "Even if you get offered a piece of jack you pass it up."

Louie meditated for another bleak mile.

"Then what's the idea? What does it get you?"

Joe shook his head. "Search me. That's what I ast the kid. He tried to tell me there was a kick in it."

He laughed. Louie said nothing. It was getting colder every minute.

"We gotta stop, first chance we get," said Louie. "I gotta get warm."

His teeth chattered. Joe nodded. He stepped on the gas. Louie hunched deeper into the fur-lined benny. It was a long time before they saw a light, and this came from a house that stood well back from the highway, with only a footpath trodden through the snow of the narrow lane that led toward it.

"Stop, anyhow," said Louie. "I gotta get warm."

Joe parked the car. They stumbled, stiff-kneed, toward the lighted window. Joe didn't bother about knocking; the door wasn't locked; they came into a kitchen and made straight for the cook-stove, leaning over it, holding numb hands close to the warm metal.

Somebody was talking in the next room. The voice came through the partition, a heavy voice with a jeering laugh in it.

"Oh, all right, then. If you're so hard up as all that I better take the kid along with me. If you ain't got a cent in the house how you going to feed her? Get her clothes and —"

A murmur, in another voice. Then a laugh.

"I thought so! All right. Come through, then. And nex' time I hike all the way out here, don't try to gimme no stall about being broke, see?"

Over the stove Louie nodded thoughtfully. His fingers were coming back to life; he made them squirm slowly in the warmth.

He kept on working them when the door opened and a big man in a sheepskin jacket came to a sudden halt on the threshold, staring at the two who crouched beside the stove. The big

Copyright, 1930, by The Crowell-Collier Publishing Company

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man's hand held a few dollar bills and the thick fingers slowly wadded them together, but except for this there was a moment of watchful silence.

"Just stopped in to get warm," said Louie.

"That's all right by me," the big man replied. "Make yourselves to home. I gotta beat it."

He shambled quickly across the room. The door slammed. Joe and Louie turned to face the old woman who stood in the doorway. She was homely and shapeless in the baggy red sweater buttoned over a flannel nightgown; her gray-streaked hair fell in a loose, skimpy braid; her faded eyes were heavy with sleep.

"It's all right," said Louie. "We saw your light and we stopped in to get warm, that's all."

His teeth still chattered and in spite of the stove and the fur benny his narrow shoulders shivered a little. The old woman came suddenly awake.

"You're chilled through," she said. "I'll make you some real hot tea. That'll do you more good than the stove will."

She set about brewing it, moving soundlessly in shapeless felt slippers and talking in a carefully hushed whisper. By the time the kettle boiled Joe and Louie had heard all about her granddaughter, who had a little cold and mustn't be waked up if it could be avoided; they heard about the pension money, too — you could get along first-rate on forty dollars a month if — The old lady didn't finish that sentence, but she glanced at the door and her faded eyes got scared and worried again.

"That the kid's father that was here?" said Louie. "Your son, huh?"

"My son-in-law." She spoke sharply and then, as if she was afraid, looked again at the door. Louie sipped the scalding tea with noisy relish. His teeth had stopped chattering.

"You and the kid would get along all right if it wasn't for him shaking you down all the time, huh?" The woman looked startled. Louie jerked his head toward the inner door. "Heard him doing it," he told her.

"He —" she paused. "Ed don't help much," she admitted.

Louie emptied his cup. He stood up and slipped into the fur benny, pulled money from his pocket.

"I couldn't take pay for a cuppa tea," said the old woman. Louie grinned and put a bill on the oilcloth. She made him take it back.

"I wouldn't feel right, taking pay for a cuppa tea."

Louie let it go at that. He pocketed the bill and followed Joe into the cold enmity of the wind. They didn't speak till they reached the car. Joe, taking his place at the wheel, held the front door open for Louie to get in beside him, but Louie chose instead to ride in the back seat.

"Colder in back," said Joe. "What's the big idea?"

Louie spoke through the collar of the benny.

"Want to try something. Drive kind of slow."

Joe obeyed. After a mile or so the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

headlights picked out a figure plodding, head lowered, on the far edge of the swept concrete. It stopped, turned, raised an arm in half-hearted petition.

"Stop!" said Louie. The tires squealed. Twenty paces beyond the big man in the sheepskin coat the car halted. Running footsteps rang on the concrete. Louie had the door open.

"All set, Joe." The car was away like a sprinter as the big man scrambled in and sat down heavily on the seat beside Louie.

"Much obliged," he said.

"Don't mention it," said Louie.

"Only going as far as Milton but it's sure one cold night for walking."

"Cold night for a ride, too," said Louie. Nevertheless he unbuttoned the benny. He snickered softly and the big man's head twisted to stare at him in the dim light that came back from the dash. Louie's hand snaked under the flap of the fur coat; in the same motion it was withdrawn and thrust hard against the sheepskin jacket.

The big man sat very still.

"What's the idea?" he whined.

"You ast for a ride," said Louie. "You get it, see?"

He fired thrice. The big man hardly moved. The wind snatched the sharp, snapping noises away. Big Joe didn't turn his head. Presently, at a stone bridge over a black, shivering little river, he stopped, climbed out and, with a little help from Louie, lifted the heavy, awkward burden down to the low parapet.

"'S a good place," said Louie. "You always pick good places, Joe. Give a poosh."

There was a splash. Joe slapped his palms together. Louie buttoned the benny and climbed into the front seat. The car made another of Joe's sprinting starts.

"The kid had the right dope," said Louie.

"Yeh?" said Joe.

"Yeh." Louie hunched deeply into the fur collar. "It sure hands you a kick." He meditated. "Every day would be too often to do one, though."

"One what?" said Joe.

"Unconscious!" said Louie, impatiently. "What'd we just pull off? A play with no jack in it — a — a — what did the kid call it? A good act?"

Joe got it. "Oh, a good deed, huh?"

"Sure," said Louie. "A good deed. You could step on it, Joe. I ain't cold, now."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Baroness Orczy's Old Man in the Corner is one of the best known detective characters in the history of the genre. Yet what do we know about him? A dossier would reveal that he is old and nameless; that he is a pale, thin scarecrow of a man, bird-like and goggled, forever wearing the same tweed suit, bow tie, and old-fashioned collar; that his favorite haunt is an A.B.C. tea shop where he relates the solutions of otherwise unfathomable mysteries to Miss Polly Burton, a female reporter and credible "Watson"; that his diet consists wholly of cheese cake and milk; that he is nervous and fidgety, always tying and untying complicated knots in a ragged piece of string.

Of these facts we can be reasonably certain: Baroness Orczy stressed them and repeated them in nearly every tale she wrote of the shriveled old logician. But there are other attributes and idiosyncrasies of the Old Man that we have also accepted without question lo these many years.

For example: the Old Man in the Corner is invariably described as one of the earliest Armchair Detectives in fiction. In fact, his manhunting method is so sedentary that he has never been known to visit the scene of a crime or examine the evidence — indeed, do you even recall his ever rising from the corner table in the London tea shop?

Now, most of us — readers, writers, and reviewers — would swear by these facts: in our minds and in our memories the Old Man in the Corner is the purest of Armchair Detectives and never once in his entire criminological career has he actually gone to the scene of a crime.

Alas: a sleuthian snare and a detectival delusion. For the truth of the matter we now call to the stand the only expert witness — the creator of the Old Man, the author herself. Her testimony, you will agree, is relevant, material, and incontrovertible.

THE MYSTERIOUS DEATH IN PERCY STREET

by BARONESS ORCZY

Miss Polly Burton had had many an argument with Mr. Richard Frobisher about that old man in the corner, who seemed far more interesting and deucedly more mysterious than any of the crimes over which he philosophized.

Dick thought, moreover, that Miss Polly spent more of her leisure time now in that A.B.C. shop than she had done in his own company before, and told her so, with that delightful air of sheepish sulkiness which the male creature invariably wears when he

Copyright, 1909, 1937, by Baroness Orczy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

feels jealous and will not admit it.

Polly liked Dick to be jealous, but she liked that old scarecrow in the A.B.C. shop very much too, and though she made sundry vague promises from time to time to Mr. Richard Frobisher, she nevertheless drifted back instinctively day after day to the tea shop in Norfolk Street, Strand, and stayed there sipping coffee for as long as the man in the corner chose to talk.

On this particular afternoon she went to the A.B.C. shop with a fixed purpose, that of making him give her his views of Mrs. Owen's mysterious death in Percy Street.

The facts had interested and puzzled her. She had had countless arguments with Mr. Richard Frobisher as to the three great possible solutions of the puzzle — "Accident, Suicide, Murder?"

"Undoubtedly neither accident nor suicide," the old man said drily.

Polly was not aware that she had spoken. What an uncanny habit that creature had of reading her thoughts!

"You incline to the idea, then, that Mrs. Owen was murdered. Do you know by whom?"

He laughed, and drew forth the piece of string he always fidgeted with when unraveling some mystery.

"You would like to know who murdered that old woman?" he asked at last.

"I would like to hear your views on the subject," Polly replied.

"I have no views," he said. "No one can know who murdered the woman, since no one ever saw the person who did it. No one can give the faintest description of the mysterious man who alone could have committed that clever deed, and the police are playing a game of blind man's buff."

"But you must have formed some theory of your own," she persisted.

It annoyed her that the funny creature was obstinate about this point, and she tried to nettle his vanity.

"I suppose that as a matter of fact your original remark that 'there are no such things as mysteries' does not apply universally. There is a mystery — that of the death in Percy Street, and you, like the police, are unable to fathom it."

He pulled up his eyebrows and looked at her for a minute or two.

"Confess that that murder was one of the cleverest bits of work accomplished outside Russian diplomacy," he said with a nervous laugh. "I must say that were I the judge, called upon to pronounce sentence of death on the man who conceived that murder, I could not bring myself to do it. I would politely request the gentleman to enter our Foreign Office — we have need of such men. The whole *mise en scène* was truly artistic, worthy of its *milieu* — the Rubens Studios in Percy Street, Tottenham Court Road.

"Have you ever noticed them? They are only studios by name, and are merely a set of rooms in a corner house, with the windows slightly enlarged, and the rents charged accordingly in consideration of that addi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tional five inches of smoky daylight, filtering through dusty windows. On the ground floor there is the order office of some stained-glass works, with a workshop in the rear, and on the first-floor landing a small room allotted to the caretaker, with gas, coal, and fifteen shillings a week, for which princely income she is deputed to keep tidy and clean the general aspect of the house.

"Mrs. Owen, who was the caretaker there, was a quiet, respectable woman, who eked out her scanty wages by sundry — mostly very meagre — tips doled out to her by impecunious artists in exchange for promiscuous domestic services in and about the respective studios.

"But if Mrs. Owen's earnings were not large, they were very regular, and she had no fastidious tastes. She and her cockatoo lived on her wages; and all the tips added up, and never spent, year after year, went to swell a very comfortable little account at interest in the Birkbeck Bank. This little account had mounted up to a very tidy sum, and the thrifty widow, or old maid — no one ever knew which she was — was generally referred to by the young artists of the Rubens Studios as a 'lady of means.' But this is a digression.

"No one slept on the premises except Mrs. Owen and her cockatoo. The rule was that one by one as the tenants left their rooms in the evening they took their respective keys to the caretaker's room. She would then, in the early morning, tidy and dust the studios and the office downstairs, lay the fire, and carry up coals.

"The foreman of the glass works was the first to arrive in the morning. He had a latchkey, and let himself in, after which it was the custom of the house that he should leave the street door open for the benefit of the other tenants and their visitors.

"Usually, when he came at about nine o'clock, he found Mrs. Owen busy about the house doing her work, and he had often a brief chat with her about the weather, but on this particular morning of February 2nd he neither saw nor heard her. However, as the shop had been tidied and the fire laid, he surmised that Mrs. Owen had finished her work earlier than usual, and thought no more about it. One by one the tenants of the studios turned up, and the day sped on without anyone's attention being drawn noticeably to the fact that the caretaker had not appeared upon the scene.

"It had been a bitterly cold night, and the day was even worse; a cutting northeasterly gale was blowing, there had been a great deal of snow during the night which lay quite thick on the ground, and at five o'clock in the afternoon, when the last glimmer of the pale winter daylight had disappeared, the confraternity of the brush put palette and easel aside and prepared to go home. The first to leave was Mr. Charles Pitt; he locked up his studio and, as usual, took his key into the caretaker's room.

"He had just opened the door when

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an icy blast literally struck him in the face; both the windows were wide open, and the snow and sleet were beating thickly into the room, forming already a white carpet upon the floor.

"The room was in semi-obscurity, and at first Mr. Pitt saw nothing, but instinctively realizing that something was wrong, he lit a match, and saw before him the spectacle of that awful and mysterious tragedy which has ever since puzzled both police and public. On the floor, already half covered by the drifting snow, lay the body of Mrs. Owen face downwards, in a nightgown, with feet and ankles bare, and these and her hands were of a deep purple color; while in a corner of the room, hunched up with the cold, the body of the cockatoo lay stark and stiff.

"At first there was only talk of a terrible accident, the result of some inexplicable carelessness which perhaps the evidence at the inquest would help to elucidate.

"Medical assistance came too late; the unfortunate woman was indeed dead, frozen to death, inside her own room. Further examination showed that she had received a severe blow at the back of the head, which must have stunned her and caused her to fall, helpless, beside the open window. Temperature at five degrees below zero had done the rest. Detective-Inspector Howell discovered close to the window a wrought-iron gas bracket, the height of which corresponded exactly with the bruise which was at the back of Mrs. Owen's head.

"Hardly however had a couple of days elapsed when public curiosity was whetted by a few startling headlines, such as the halfpenny evening papers alone know how to concoct.

"'The mysterious death in Percy Street.' 'Is it Suicide or Murder?' 'Thrilling details — Strange developments.' 'Sensational Arrest.'

"What had happened was simply this:

"At the inquest a few very curious facts connected with Mrs. Owen's life had come to light, and this had led to the apprehension of a young man of very respectable parentage on a charge of being concerned in the tragic death of the unfortunate caretaker.

"To begin with, it happened that her life, which in an ordinary way should have been very monotonous and regular, seemed, at any rate latterly, to have been more than usually chequered and excited. Every witness who had known her in the past concurred in the statement that since October last a great change had come over the worthy and honest woman.

"I happen to have a photo of Mrs. Owen as she was before this great change occurred in her quiet and uneventful life, and which led, as far as the poor soul was concerned, to such disastrous results.

"Here she is to the life," added the funny creature, placing the photo before Polly — "as respectable, as stodgy, as uninteresting as it is possible for a member of your charming sex to be; not a face, you will admit, to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED.

lead any youngster to temptation or to induce him to commit a crime.

"Nevertheless, one day all the tenants of the Rubens Studios were surprised and shocked to see Mrs. Owen, quiet, respectable, Mrs. Owen, sallying forth at six o'clock in the afternoon, attired in an extravagant bonnet and a cloak trimmed with imitation astrakhan which — slightly open in front — displayed a gold locket and chain of astonishing proportions.

"Many were the comments, the hints, the bits of sarcasm leveled at the worthy woman by the frivolous confraternity of the brush.

"The plot thickened when from that day forth a complete change came over the worthy caretaker of the Rubens Studios. While she appeared day after day before the astonished gaze of the tenants and the scandalized looks of the neighbors, attired in new and extravagant dresses, her work was hopelessly neglected, and she was always 'out' when wanted.

"There was, of course, much talk and comment in various parts of the Rubens Studios on the subject of Mrs. Owen's 'dissipations.' The tenants began to put two and two together, and after a very little while the general consensus of opinion became firmly established that the honest caretaker's demoralization coincided week for week, almost day for day, with young Greenhill's establishment in No. 8 Studio.

"Everyone had remarked that he stayed much later in the evening than anyone else, and yet no one presumed that he stayed for purposes of work. Suspicions soon rose to certainty when Mrs. Owen and Arthur Greenhill were seen by one of the glass workmen dining together at Gambia's Restaurant in Tottenham Court Road.

"The workman, who was having a cup of tea at the counter, noticed particularly that when the bill was paid the money came out of Mrs. Owen's purse. The dinner had been sumptuous — veal cutlets, a cut from the joint, dessert, coffee, and liqueurs. Finally, the pair left the restaurant apparently very gay, young Greenhill smoking a choice cigar.

"Irregularities such as these were bound sooner or later to come to the ears and eyes of Mr. Allman, the landlord of the Rubens Studios; and a month after the New Year, without further warning, he gave her a week's notice to quit his house.

" 'Mrs. Owen did not seem the least bit upset when I gave her notice,' Mr. Allman declared in his evidence at the inquest; 'on the contrary, she told me that she had ample means, and had only worked recently for the sake of something to do. She added that she had plenty of friends who would look after her, for she had a nice little pile to leave to anyone who would know how to get the right side of her.'

"Nevertheless, in spite of this cheerful interview, Miss Bedford, the tenant of No. 6 Studio, had stated that when she took her key to the caretaker's room at 6:30 that afternoon she found Mrs. Owen in tears. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

caretaker refused to be comforted, nor would she speak of her trouble to Miss Bedford.

"Twenty-four hours later she was found dead.

"The coroner's jury returned an open verdict, and Detective-Inspector Jones was charged by the police to make some enquiries about young Mr. Greenhill, whose intimacy with the unfortunate woman had been universally commented upon.

"The detective, however, pushed his investigations as far as the Birkbeck Bank. There he discovered that after her interview with Mr. Allman, Mrs. Owen had withdrawn what money she had on deposit, some £800, the result of twenty-five years' saving and thrift.

"But the immediate result of Detective-Inspector Jones's labors was that Mr. Arthur Greenhill, lithographer, was brought before the magistrate at Bow Street on the charge of being concerned in the death of Mrs. Owen.

"Now, you know as well as I do how the attitude of the young prisoner impressed the magistrate and police so unfavorably that, with every new witness brought forward, his position became more and more unfortunate. Yet he was a good-looking, rather coarsely built young fellow, with one of those awful Cockney accents which literally make one jump. But he looked painfully nervous, stammered at every word spoken, and repeatedly gave answers entirely at random.

"His father acted as lawyer for him, a rough-looking elderly man, who had the appearance of a country attorney rather than of a London solicitor.

"The police had built up a fairly strong case against the lithographer. Medical evidence revealed nothing new: Mrs. Owen had died from exposure, the blow at the back of the head not being sufficiently serious to cause anything but temporary disablement. When the medical officer had been called in, death had intervened for some time; it was quite impossible to say how long, whether one hour, or five, or twelve.

"The appearance and state of the room, when the unfortunate woman was found by Mr. Charles Pitt, were again gone over in minute detail. Mrs. Owen's clothes, which she had worn during the day, were folded neatly on a chair. The key of her cupboard was in the pocket of her dress. The door had been slightly ajar, but both the windows were wide open; one of them, which had the sash-line broken, had been fastened up most scientifically with a piece of rope.

"Mrs. Owen had obviously undressed preparatory to going to bed, and the magistrate very naturally soon made the remark how untenable the theory of an accident must be. No one in their five senses would undress with a temperature at below zero, and the windows wide open.

"After these preliminary statements the cashier of the Birkbeck was called and he related the caretaker's visit at the bank.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"'It was then about one o'clock,' he stated. 'Mrs. Owen called and presented a check to self for £827, the amount of her balance. She seemed exceedingly happy and cheerful, and talked about needing plenty of cash, as she was going abroad to join her nephew, for whom she would in future keep house. I warned her about being sufficiently careful with so large a sum, and parting from it injudiciously, as women of her class are very apt to do. She laughingly declared that not only was she careful of it in the present, but meant to be so for the far-off future, for she intended to go that very day to a lawyer's office and to make a will.'

"The cashier's evidence was certainly startling in the extreme, since in the widow's room no trace of any kind was found of any money; against that, two of the notes handed over by the bank to Mrs. Owen on that day were cashed by young Greenhill on the very morning of her mysterious death. One was handed in by him to the West End Clothiers Company, in payment for a suit of clothes, and the other he changed at the Post Office in Oxford Street.

"After that all the evidence had of necessity to be gone through again on the subject of young Greenhill's intimacy with Mrs. Owen. He listened to it all with an air of the most painful nervousness; his cheeks were positively green, his lips seemed dry and parched, for he repeatedly passed his tongue over them, and when Constable E 18 deposed that at 2 a.m. on the morning of February 2nd he had seen the accused and spoken to him at the corner of Percy Street and Tottenham Court Road, young Greenhill all but fainted.

"The contention of the police was that the caretaker had been murdered and robbed during that night before she went to bed, that young Greenhill had done the murder, seeing that he was the only person known to have been intimate with the woman, and that it was, moreover, proved unquestionably that he was in the immediate neighborhood of the Rubens Studios at an extraordinarily late hour of the night.

"His own account of himself, and of that same night, could certainly not be called very satisfactory. Mrs. Owen was a relative of his late mother's, he declared. He himself was a lithographer by trade, with a good deal of time and leisure on his hands. He certainly had employed some of that time in taking the old woman to various places of amusement. He had on more than one occasion suggested that she should give up menial work and come and live with him, but, unfortunately, she was a great deal imposed upon by her nephew, a man of the name of Owen, who exploited the good-natured woman in every possible way, and who had on more than one occasion made severe attacks upon her savings at the Birkbeck Bank.

"Severely cross-examined by the prosecuting counsel about this supposed relative of Mrs. Owen, Greenhill admitted that he did not know

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him — had, in fact, never seen him. He knew that his name was Owen, and that was all. His chief occupation consisted in sponging on the kind-hearted old woman, but he only went to see her in the evenings, when he presumably knew that she would be alone, and invariably after all the tenants of the Rubens Studios had left for the day.

"I don't know whether at this point it strikes you at all, as it did both magistrate and counsel, that there was a direct contradiction in this statement and the one made by the cashier of the Birkbeck on the subject of his last conversation with Mrs. Owen. 'I am going abroad to join my nephew, for whom I am going to keep house,' was what the unfortunate woman had said.

"Now Greenhill, in spite of his nervousness and at times contradictory answers, strictly adhered to his point, that there was a nephew in London who came frequently to see his aunt.

"Anyway, the sayings of the murdered woman could not be taken as evidence in law. Mr. Greenhill senior put the objection, adding: 'There may have been two nephews,' which the magistrate and the prosecution were bound to admit.

"With regard to the night immediately preceding Mrs. Owen's death, Greenhill stated that he had been with her to the theatre, had seen her home, and had had some supper with here in her room. Before he left her, at 2 a.m., she had of her own accord made him a present of £10, saying: 'I am a sort of aunt to you, Arthur, and if you don't have it, Bill is sure to get it.'

"She had seemed rather worried in the early part of the evening, but later on she cheered up.

" 'Did she speak at all about this nephew of hers or about her money affairs?' asked the magistrate.

"Again the young man hesitated, but said, 'No, she did not mention either Owen or her money affairs.'

"If I remember rightly," added the old man in the corner, "for recollect I was not present, the case was here adjourned. But the magistrate would not grant bail. Greenhill was removed looking more dead than alive — though everyone remarked that Mr. Greenhill senior looked determined and not the least worried. In the course of his examination on behalf of his son, of the medical officer and one or two other witnesses, he had very ably tried to confuse them on the subject of the hour at which Mrs. Owen was last known to be alive.

"He made a very great point of the fact that the usual morning's work was done throughout the house when the inmates arrived. Was it conceivable, he argued, that a woman would do that kind of work overnight, especially as she was going to the theatre, and therefore would wish to dress in her smarter clothes? It certainly was a very nice point leveled against the prosecution, who promptly retorted: Just as conceivable as that a woman in those circumstances of life should,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

having done her work, undress beside an open window at nine o'clock in the morning with the snow beating into the room.

"Now it seems that Mr. Greenhill senior could produce any amount of witnesses who could help to prove a conclusive alibi on behalf of his son, if only some time subsequent to that fatal 2 a.m. the murdered woman had been seen alive by some chance passer-by. Mr. Greenhill senior was an able man and an earnest one, and I fancy the magistrate felt some sympathy for his strenuous endeavors on his son's behalf. He granted a week's adjournment, which seemed to satisfy Mr. Greenhill completely.

"In the meanwhile the papers had talked of and almost exhausted the subject of the mystery in Percy Street. There had been, as you no doubt know from personal experience, innumerable arguments on the puzzling alternatives:

"Accident?

"Suicide?

"Murder?

"A week went by, and then the case against young Greenhill was resumed. Of course, the court was crowded. It needed no great penetration to remark at once that the prisoner looked more hopeful, and his father quite elated.

"Again a great deal of minor evidence was taken, and then came the turn of the defense. Mr. Greenhill called Mrs. Hall, confectioner, of Percy Street, opposite the Rubens Studios. She deposed that at 8 o'clock in the morning of February 2nd, while she was tidying her shop window, she saw the caretaker of the Studios opposite, as usual, on her knees, her head and body wrapped in a shawl, cleaning her front steps. Her husband also saw Mrs. Owen, and Mrs. Hall remarked to her husband how thankful she was that her own shop had tiled steps, which did not need scrubbing on so cold a morning.

"Mr. Hall, confectioner, of the same address, corroborated this statement, and Mr. Greenhill, with absolute triumph, produced a third witness, Mrs. Martin, of Percy Street, who from her window on the second floor had, at 7:30 a.m., seen the caretaker shaking mats outside her front door. The description this witness gave of Mrs. Owen's get-up, with the shawl round her head, coincided point by point with that given by Mr. and Mrs. Hall.

"After that Mr. Greenhill's task became an easy one; his son was at home having his breakfast at 8 o'clock that morning — not only himself but his servants would testify to that.

"The weather had been so bitter that the whole of that day young Greenhill had not stirred from his own fireside. Mrs. Owen was murdered after 8 a.m. on that day, since she was seen alive by three people at that hour, therefore his son could not have murdered Mrs. Owen. The police must find the criminal elsewhere, or else bow to the opinion originally expressed by the public that Mrs. Owen had met with a ter-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rible untoward accident, or that perhaps she may have wilfully sought her own death in that extraordinary and tragic fashion.

"Before young Greenhill was finally discharged, one or two witnesses were again examined, chief among these being the foreman of the glassworks. He had turned up at Rubens Studios at 9 o'clock, and been in business all day. He averred positively that he did not specially notice any suspicious-looking individual crossing the hall that day. 'But,' he remarked with a smile, 'I don't sit and watch everyone who goes up and down stairs. I am too busy for that. The street door is always left open; anyone can walk in, up or down, who knows the way.'

"That there was a mystery in connection with Mrs. Owen's death — of that the police have remained perfectly convinced; whether young Greenhill held the key of that mystery or not they have never found out to this day.

"I could enlighten them as to the cause of the young lithographer's anxiety at the magisterial inquiry, but, I assure you, I do not care to do the work of the police for them. Why should I? Greenhill will never suffer from unjust suspicions. He and his father alone — besides myself — know in what a terribly tight corner he all but found himself.

"The young man did not reach home till nearly five o'clock that morning. His last train had gone; he had to walk, lost his way, and wandered about Hampstead for hours. Think what his position would have been if the worthy confectioners of Percy Street had not seen Mrs. Owen 'wrapped up in a shawl, on her knees, doing the front steps.'

"Moreover, Mr. Greenhill senior is a solicitor, who has a small office in John Street, Bedford Row. The afternoon before her death Mrs. Owen had been to that office and had there made a will by which she left all her savings to young Arthur Greenhill, lithographer. Had that will been in other than paternal hands, it would have been proved, in the natural course of such things, and one other link would have been added to the chain which nearly dragged Arthur Greenhill to the gallows — 'the link of a very strong motive.'

"Can you wonder that the young man turned livid, until such time as it was proved beyond a doubt that the murdered woman was alive hours after he had reached the safe shelter of his home.

"I saw you smile when I used the word 'murdered,' " continued the old man in the corner, growing quite excited now that he was approaching the dénouement of his story. "I know that the public, after the magistrate had discharged Arthur Greenhill, were quite satisfied to think that the mystery in Percy Street was a case of accident — or suicide."

"No," replied Polly, "there could be no question of suicide for two very distinct reasons."

He looked at her with some degree of astonishment. She supposed that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he was amazed at her venturing to form an opinion of her own.

"And may I ask what, in your opinion, these reasons are?" he asked very sarcastically.

"To begin with, the question of money," she said. "Has any more of it been traced so far?"

"Not another £5 note," he said with a chuckle; "they were all cashed in Paris during the Exhibition, and you have no conception how easy a thing that is to do, at any of the hotels or smaller *agents de change*."

"That nephew was a clever blackguard," she commented.

"You believe, then, in the existence of that nephew?"

"Why should I doubt it? Someone must have existed who was sufficiently familiar with the house to go about in it in the middle of the day without attracting anyone's attention."

"In the middle of the day?" he said with a chuckle.

"Any time after 8:30 in the morning."

"So you, too, believe in the 'caretaker, wrapped up in a shawl,' cleaning her front steps?" he queried.

"But ——"

"It never struck you, in spite of the training your interviews with me must have given you, that the person who carefully did all the work in the Rubens Studios, laid the fires, and carried up the coals, merely did it in order to gain time; in order that the bitter frost might really and effectually do its work, and Mrs. Owen not be missed until she was truly dead."

"But ——" suggested Polly again.

"It never struck you that one of the greatest secrets of successful crime is to lead the police astray with regard to the *time* when the crime was committed.

"In this case the 'nephew,' since we admit his existence, would — even if he were ever found, which is doubtful — be able to prove as good an alibi as young Greenhill."

"But I don't understand——"

"How the murder was committed?" he said eagerly. "Surely you can see it all for yourself, since you admit the 'nephew' — a scamp, perhaps — who sponges on the good-natured woman. He terrorizes and threatens her, so much so that she fancies her money is no longer safe even in the Birkbeck Bank. Women of that class are apt at times to mistrust the Bank of England. Anyway, she withdraws her money. Who knows what she meant to do with it in the immediate future?

"In any case, she wishes to give it after her death to a young man whom she likes, and who has known how to win her good graces. That afternoon the nephew begs, entreats for more money; they have a row; the poor woman is in tears, and is only temporarily consoled by a pleasant visit at the theatre.

"At 2 o'clock in the morning young Greenhill parts from her. Two minutes later the nephew knocks at the door. He comes with a plausible tale of having missed his last train, and asks for 'a shake down' somewhere in the house. The good-natured

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

woman suggests a sofa in one of the studios, and then quietly prepares to go to bed. The rest is very simple and elementary. The nephew sneaks into his aunt's room, finds her standing in her nightgown; he demands money with threats of violence; terrified, she staggers, knocks her head against the gas bracket, and falls on the floor stunned, while the nephew seeks for her keys and takes possession of the eight hundred-odd pounds. You will admit that the subsequent *mise en scène* is worthy of a genius.

"No struggle, not the usual hideous accessories round a crime. Only the open windows, the bitter north-easterly gale, and the heavily falling snow — two silent accomplices, as silent as the dead.

"After that the murderer, with perfect presence of mind, busies himself in the house, doing the work which will insure that Mrs. Owen shall not be missed, at any rate, for some time. He dusts and tidies; some few hours later he even slips on his aunt's skirt and bodice, wraps his head in a shawl, and boldly allows those neighbors who are astir to see what they believe to be Mrs. Owen. Then he goes back to her room, resumes his normal appearance, and quietly leaves the house."

"He may have been seen."

"He undoubtedly *was* seen by two or three people, but no one thought anything of seeing a man leave the house at that hour. It was very cold, the snow was falling thickly, and as he wore a muffler round the lower part of his face, those who saw him would not undertake to know him again."

"That man was never seen nor heard of again?" Polly asked.

"He has disappeared off the face of the earth. The police are searching for him, and perhaps some day they will find him — then society will be rid of one of the most ingenious men of the age."

The old man had paused, absorbed in meditation. The young girl also was silent. Some memory too vague as yet to take a definite form was persistently haunting her; one thought was hammering away in her brain, and playing havoc with her nerves. That thought was the inexplicable feeling within her that there was something in connection with that hideous crime which she ought to recollect, something which — if she could only remember what it was — would give her the clue to the tragic mystery, and for once insure her triumph over this self-conceited and sarcastic scarecrow in the corner.

He was watching her through his great bone-rimmed spectacles, and she could see the knuckles of his bony hands, just above the top of the table, fidgeting, fidgeting, fidgeting, till she wondered if there existed another set of fingers in the world which would undo the knots his lean ones made in that tiresome piece of string.

Then suddenly — *à propos* of nothing, Polly *remembered* — the whole thing stood before her, short and clear like a vivid flash of lightning —

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mrs. Owen lying dead in the snow beside her open window; one of them with a broken sash-line, tied up most scientifically with a piece of string. She remembered the talk there had been at the time about this improvised sash-line.

That was after young Greenhill had been discharged, and the question of suicide had been voted out.

Polly remembered that in the illustrated papers photographs appeared of this wonderfully knotted piece of string, so contrived that the weight of the frame could but tighten the knots, and thus keep the window open. She remembered that people deduced many things from that improvised sash-line, chief among these deductions being that the murderer was a sailor — so wonderful, so complicated, so numerous were the knots which secured that window-frame.

But Polly knew better. In her mind's eye she saw those fingers, rendered doubly nervous by the fearful cerebral excitement, grasping at first mechanically, even thoughtlessly, a bit of twine with which to secure the window; then the ruling habit strongest through all, the girl could see it; the lean and ingenious fingers fidgeting, fidgeting with that piece of string, tying knot after knot, more wonderful, more complicated, than any she had yet witnessed.

"If I were you," she said, without daring to look into that corner where he sat, "I would break myself of the habit of perpetually making knots in a piece of string."

He did not reply, and at last Polly ventured to look up — the corner was empty, and through the glass door beyond the desk, where he had just deposited his few coppers, she saw the tails of his tweed coat, his extraordinary hat, his meagre, shriveled-up personality, fast disappearing down the street.

Miss Polly Burton (of the *Evening Observer*) was married the other day to Mr. Richard Frobisher (of the *London Mail*). She has never set eyes on the old man in the corner from that day to this.

Now that you have finished reading "The Mysterious Death in Percy Street," you see how this single story invalidates the accepted characterization of the Old Man in the Corner. Was he the perfect Armchair Detective? Far from it. No more so, in fact, than M. P. Shiel's Prince Zaleski, who has also been called one of the earliest Armchair Detectives in fiction. In spirit and in original intention, the Prince and the Old Man are the very quintessence of sitting sleuths, of inactive investigators. In Zaleski's first two cases ("The Race of Orven" and "The Stone of the Edmundsbury Monks") the esoteric Prince solved mysteries without leaving his scented, barbaric, curio-clustered apartment; indeed, he seldom even rose from his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cloth-of-silver couch. But in the third story ("The S.S.") Zaleski quit his "ivory tower" and became a veritable leg-man of the law.

So with the Old Man in the Corner.

In thirty-six short stories the pale, thin, timid man in the bone-rimmed spectacles sits at his providential table in the London tea shop, munching his proverbial cheese cake, sipping his perennial milk, his prying fingers tying endless knots while his penetrating mind solves case after case that has perplexed the police. Yes, the perfect Armchair Detective. But in the thirty-seventh story the Old Man forfeits all claim to Armchairship. Indeed, he forfeits all claim to Detectiveship. No longer can it be said that the Old Man never visited the scene of a crime . . .

Dorothy L. Sayers reprinted "The Mysterious Death" in the London edition of one of her anthologies. She listed the tale as a "Story of Pure Analysis." Rarely do we quarrel with Miss Sayers's judgment, but there is no doubt that she too is guilty of perpetuating the old misconception about the Old Man. Many of the Old Man stories undoubtedly illustrate the application of pure analysis, but surely "The Mysterious Death" is not one of them.

If we consider Polly Burton the applicator, the story fails: not only is Miss Burton's solution far from airtight, but it is certainly not based on "pure analysis." And while the Old Man could have offered a more specific solution then he actually did, it could hardly be defended as an example of "pure analysis." For the regrettable truth is, Baroness Orczy committed the cardinal error of technique: she gave her detective (the Old Man) inside information which she never divulged to the reader. For thirty-six cases the Old Man is all he is reputed to be: an armchair detector of crime. In the thirty-seventh case he is exactly the opposite: an active perpetrator of crime. Many criminals of fiction have become crime-busters, but few manhunters have become murderers.

And still that is not the most mysterious thing Baroness Orczy did. After establishing the Old Man as a detective in thirty-six cases, why did she transform him into a criminal in the thirty-seventh case? And precisely why did the Old Man murder Mrs. Owen anyway? For the eight hundred-odd pounds? It is difficult to believe — almost as difficult as if we were asked to believe that Sherlock Holmes paid his share of the rent at 221B Baker Street by being secretly a hold-up man or a cat burglar. Did Baroness Orczy mean to imply that all along the Old Man had been leading a double life — a detective by day and a criminal by night? That all along we have been reading the exploits of a homicidal maniac without knowing it? If so, five will get you ten that Baroness Orczy didn't know it either!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SOMEBODY ON THE PHONE

by WILLIAM IRISH

"I HEAR it! Let it ring!" she snapped back at me. We were always snapping at each other. That's how you could tell we were brother and sister. But this snap had teeth in it. There was something frightened, tense, about it. And her face matched it — white, drawn, straining forward.

She was right in the room with it, sitting facing it in a big chair. She didn't make a move to go over and answer it. She just sat there listening to it, as if she'd never heard one before; as if she wanted to see how long it would keep up.

I happened to look at her hand, on the arm of the chair. It was heel down, but the fingers were uptilted; they weren't touching the chair-arm. And at each ring that sounded, I saw one press down, as if she were counting them to herself. The pinkie, then the ring finger, then the middle, then the index, then the thumb. Like someone practicing scales on a piano keyboard.

On the fifth ring, the thumb count, it quit. A moment's stop, as though the connection had been broken at the other end, and then it got under way again.

"You paralyzed?" I said. A whole layer of shaving soap was evaporating on me account of this foolishness. But when she saw me step out to go over to the phone, she left her chair like something out of a sling-shot, and backed up against it to keep me from getting at it.

"No, Ken! Let it alone!" There was desperation in her voice. And then the ringing quit a second time, for good, and that ended it for her. But not for me.

"You're white as a ghost. Who was that? What's going on around here? A code too, eh? Maybe you think I missed that! You count the number of rings. The other end hangs up on five, then calls right back. If the coast is clear you answer. That's bad medicine. Maybe you think I didn't see you up at the Congo Club last Tuesday night, with some guy who looked like a card sharp?"

She gave me a comet of a look — a white, startled flash.

"I didn't butt in," I said, "because you've always been very level headed. You've always known your way around. One thing sure, it wasn't a social meeting. I watched the two of you. You weren't there for dancing or for drinking; you were there to talk business."

She shivered as if the room were cold, but it was July. She tried to put a bold front on it. "Go ahead, cable Dad and Mother in London — all because I don't answer a phone call. You should be a scenario writer."

Copyright, 1937, by William Irish

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I was shrugging into my coat. "I've got to make the bank before closing time. Tomorrow's pay day at the firm. I want to talk to you some more about this when I get back. Stick around."

"I'll stick around," she said. I couldn't get rid of that for years afterwards: "I'll stick around."

The teller handed back my check to me. "No funds, Mr. Hunter."

I nearly went down on the marble floor. "Why there was twenty thousand in that account on the first of last month!" The office salaries and upkeep had to come out of it, and our living expenses; Dad had given both of us access to it when he went away.

"Not only that. You're overdrawn by another thousand. We called you about it yesterday, and Miss Hunter took the message."

"Well, where's my statement? Show me the canceled checks! Who's been drawing on it?"

"We mailed that to you early in the week," he said. I thought: She must have intercepted it, then. . . .

I went back and she was waiting for me as she'd said she would. She was dressed to go out, though. I grabbed her by the wrist and swung her all the way around. "Who took you for a cleaning?" I said. "Who's been shaking you down? Where's the pearls Dad gave you for Christmas? Take off your glove — where's your diamond solitaire? You've been gambling again, haven't you?" Her head went down.

"And they found out who you were, found out we're well-heeled, knew that a scandal would kill Dad, and have been putting the screws on you ever since. Is that it?"

Her head went down a second time.

"That was what that call was, on the phone before, that frightened you so. Wasn't it?"

This time she spoke. "Yes, Ken, that was what that was."

"Gimme the guy's name," I said.

"Oh, don't!" she begged. "It'll ruin all of us. Wait here a minute. I have a better way than that. Let me handle it my way." She went into her room and closed the door.

I paced back and forth. Finally I went over and rapped. "Jean," I said, "you coming out? I want to talk to you!"

Before she could answer, the doorbell rang and a sleepy looking cop was standing there. "Hunter? Take it easy now, take it easy," he said for no apparent reason. "Your sister —"

I had no time to bother. "What d'you want? She's in her room."

"No she isn't," he said. "She just fell fifteen stories down to the street. That's what I'm trying to tell you."

I knew almost at once what I was going to do, even while they were still asking me the few routine questions.

"We were going out together," I said through my hands, "and she remembered she'd left the window open in her room. She went back a minute to close it. I guess she must have —"

Yes, they agreed sympathetically,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she must have. And they went out and closed the door.

I'd had the gun, and the license for it, ever since that time we'd been burglarized at Great Neck. I got it out and made sure it was loaded. This was a sentence — here in my mind — that no clever lawyer could set aside or whittle down to nothing. This was a sentence that smirched no names except mine. Oh, any excuse would do. I didn't like his necktie, or he'd stepped on my foot. This was a sentence from which there was no appeal. Because somebody had killed her — by calling her up on the phone. The law mightn't see it that way, but I did.

It might have seemed a funny place to go, that very night while she was still waiting somewhere in town, broken and white and all alone with just flowers. The Congo Club, with its clatter of rumba gourds and its rainbow spotlights. It didn't to me; it seemed the right place, the only place.

". . . where that empty table is, inside that booth there. Last Tuesday night, with a very pretty girl." I killed my drink at this point, and it was all salty. "I want to know who the man was."

For a hundred dollars anyone'll remember anything. "That was Buck Franklin," the manager said. "He's a club owner himself. Some sort of private gambling place. He comes here quite a lot. I expect them both tonight again. He reserved that same table."

I squeezed my glass hard with one hand and got another drop out of it; the liquid would hardly go down my throat, though. Stuck in the middle. And the glass cracked and split in two pieces. "No, he won't be here tonight — with her," I said quietly. "That's why I've got to reach him. I've got a message for him — from her."

One of the hackmen that had the concession outside might know, he suggested. The third one in line admitted he knew who the man was, and had driven him home from here numerous times. He couldn't remember where, though. He said the man always gave him five dollar tips on each haul. I gave him fifty, and then he remembered where.

He took me to the apartment.

It was him all right, the same man who had been with her at the Congo Club. He was waiting for me by the open door, after I'd been announced and sent up. "You say you've got a message for me from Miss Jean Hunter?"

"You know her then, do you?"

"Sure I know her."

"Let's close the door and keep this just between us," I suggested. He closed it.

"I've been waiting to hear from her all evening," he said aggrievedly. "I've tried to reach her at her apartment, and she's not there."

"No, she's not there," I agreed, unbuttoning my jacket so I could get at my back pocket.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm a busy man," he said. "I put myself out to do her a favor, because I feel sorry for her, and then she keeps me waiting —"

"That's her ring," I interrupted. He was breathing on a diamond solitaire he'd taken out of his vest pocket, and absent-mindedly rubbing it on the back of his hand.

"She gave it to me as collateral for a loan. I'm not sure it's worth what I let her have, but I always was an easy mark for a femme in trouble. I suppose she's out right now trying to raise the rest of it. I hope she does for her sake."

"Loan? Is that what they're calling it now?" I said without heat. "I think you better turn around. The back is about the right place."

He didn't. He got out two words after the first shot. Two husky breaths that didn't touch his larynx walls at all. "What — for?"

"For Jean Hunter," I said. The words made a sound like those gourds at the Congo Club, only a little deeper. "Here's your code back again," I said above the noise, while I kept punching the trigger in and out. "Five times, then quit, then call back again."

He was down long before the last one, so I gave it to him on the floor. I took the ring back, but I threw the gun down beside him in exchange.

There was evidently no one there with him, and the place must have been sound-proofed. No one seemed to have heard it outside in the hall when I went out there. On the way down, at first, I was going to tell the elevator operator: "I just shot that Franklin guy up there." But then I thought, "Aw, let them come over to my place after me, if they want me!" I went home.

The door was still closed, where she'd gone in that afternoon and never come out again.

"It's taken care of, Jean," I said quietly, as if she were still in there. "He won't be calling you up any —"

Just then it started to ring. *Brrring!* — one. *Brring!* — two. *Brring!* — three. *Brring!* — four. *Brring!* — five. Then it stopped for a minute.

Then it started in again.

NEXT MONTH . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will bring you:

Nicholas Blake's A STUDY IN WHITE
Cornell Woolrich's MOMENTUM
Roy Vickers's WIT'S END
Miriam Allen deFord's BEYOND THE SEA OF DEATH
Raoul Whitfield's RED DAWN
Gerald Kersh's KARMESIN, CON MAN

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ntinued from back cover)

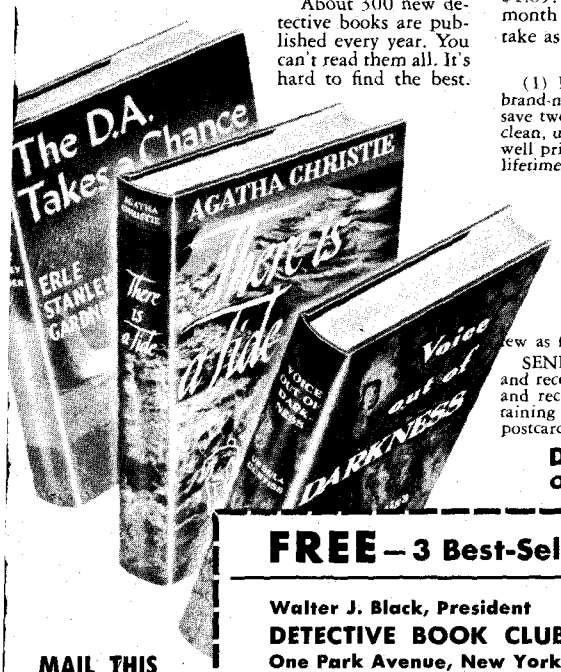
ES! ALL 3 BOOKS FREE! *Regular Publishers' Editions. A $7.50 Value*

Why does the Detective Book Club make this unusual offer?

We want you to *see* and *read* for yourself the kind of best-selling mystery novels the Detective Book Club picks for its members. Seeing is believing. Reading is proof. And the surest way to give you that proof is to GIVE you these three typical Club selections. That's why we offer you these 3 top-flight mysteries FREE . . . as a membership gift!

How You Can Get the Best NEW Mysteries

About 300 new detective books are published every year. You can't read them all. It's hard to find the best. But a mystery by Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Ellery Queen, or Mignon G. Eberhart is *sure* to be good. ALL OF THESE, and many other famous writers, have had their books selected by the Detective Book Club. Many are members themselves!



Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get three of them in one handsome volume (a $6.00 to $7.50 value) for only $1.89. You do not have to take a volume every month to maintain your Club standing; you may take as few as four each year.

You Enjoy These Four Advantages

(1) Every month you are offered the cream of fine, brand-new detective books—by the best authors. (2) You save two-thirds the usual cost. (3) Your books are fresh, clean, unopened—delivered to your door. (4) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a handsome lifetime library.

Mail Postcard NOW For Your 3 Free Books

Accept your FREE copies of these 3 top-flight mysteries NOW! You are not obligated to take every month's three-in-one selection. A description of the next month's selection will be sent to you with each month's triple-volume, and you may reject in advance any volume not wanted. You may cancel membership whenever you wish; to maintain your Club standing, you may take as few as four triple-volumes each year you are a member.

SEND NO MONEY! Simply mail postcard promptly and receive your THREE membership gift books FREE—and receive, in addition, the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books! Send postcard now.

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
One Park Ave., New York 16, N.Y.

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR THREE FREE BOOKS

●

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

FREE—3 Best-Selling Mystery Novels!

20

Walter J. Black, President OY
DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
One Park Avenue, New York 16, N. Y.

Please enroll me as a member and send me, FREE, in regular publisher's editions, the THREE best-selling mystery novels, as described. In addition, send me the current triple-volume of the month, which contains three complete new detective books.

I am not obligated to take every monthly triple-volume, and may cancel whenever I wish. I may maintain Club standing by taking as few as four selections during each year of my membership.

I will receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and may reject in advance any volume I do not wish to own. I need send no money now, but for each volume I do accept I will send only $1.89, plus few cents mailing charges, as complete payment within one week after I receive it. *(Books shipped in U.S.A. only.)*

MR.
MRS.
MISS } .....
PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY

ADDRESS.....

CITY..... Zone No. (if any)..... STATE.....

LICENSED TO UNZ
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Free TO NEW MEMBERS — ALL 3 OF THESE BAFFLING MYSTERY NOVELS!

● by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER
"Undisputed King of Mystery Writers"

● by AGATHA CHRISTIE
World-Famous Creator of Mystery Puzzlers

● by URSULA CURTIS
Sensational New Mystery "Find"

Each is a full-size book! Each is Complete!

1 ***The Exciting Best-Seller by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER***

THE CASE OF THE TROUBLESOME BRIDE

First Doris Kane finds a huge bloodstain in her daughter's bedroom. But when District Attorney Doug Selby arrives a half-hour later, the place is as clean as a whistle!

Next day—in that same house—a glamour-girl is found — STABBED TO DEATH! Doug refuses to take suicide for an answer. And when his political enemies make it tough for him to get to the bottom of the case, Doug uses some dynamite of his own to blow it wide open!

2 ***An Ingenious New Puzzler by AGATHA CHRISTIE***

THERE IS A TIDE . . .

When Rosaleen Cloade's *second* husband died, she stood to inherit his fortune. But a mysterious stranger summons her brother, David — and claims Rosaleen's FIRST husband is still ALIVE!

That means Rosaleen wasn't *legally* married to Cloade, and has no claim on his money! The stranger says he will keep quiet — for ten thousand pounds. But that night HE is MURDERED!

It's an open-and-shut case against David — until Hercule Poirot upsets the murder cart.

3 ***Winner of the Dodd, Mead Red Badge Mystery Prize!***

VOICE OUT OF DARKNESS

By URSULA CURTISS

"*You pushed her!*" said the first note to Kate Meredith. "YOU PUSHED HER!" repeated the second note, and the third.

Did she? Had Kate actually murdered that child 13 years ago? She wasn't sure! Now—after all those years—the sinister memory of her accuser was haunting her, whirling around in her head, driving her *mad*! . . . Brrr! There are more chills here than just the blizzard that howls through its pages. As you read it you'll understand *why* it's such a sensational prize-winner!

FIRST CLASS PERMIT No. 7
(Sec. 510, P. L. & R.)
New York, N. Y.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD
No Postage Stamp Necessary if Mailed in the United States

4¢ POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

ONE PARK AVENUE

NEW YORK 16, N. Y.

FREE!

3 best-selling, full-length *mystery novels*! Suspense-packed thrillers by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER and AGATHA CHRISTIE —*plus* a chiller by URSULA CURTISS, the mystery "find" of the year. Her book, *Voice Out of Darkness*, won the Dodd, Mead Red Badge Mystery Prize.

Each novel is complete. Each is selling *right now* for $2.50 a copy—a total of $7.50. But ALL 3 are yours FREE, as a membership gift from the Detective Book Club!

(Continued on inside cover)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED